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# SERMONS

BY

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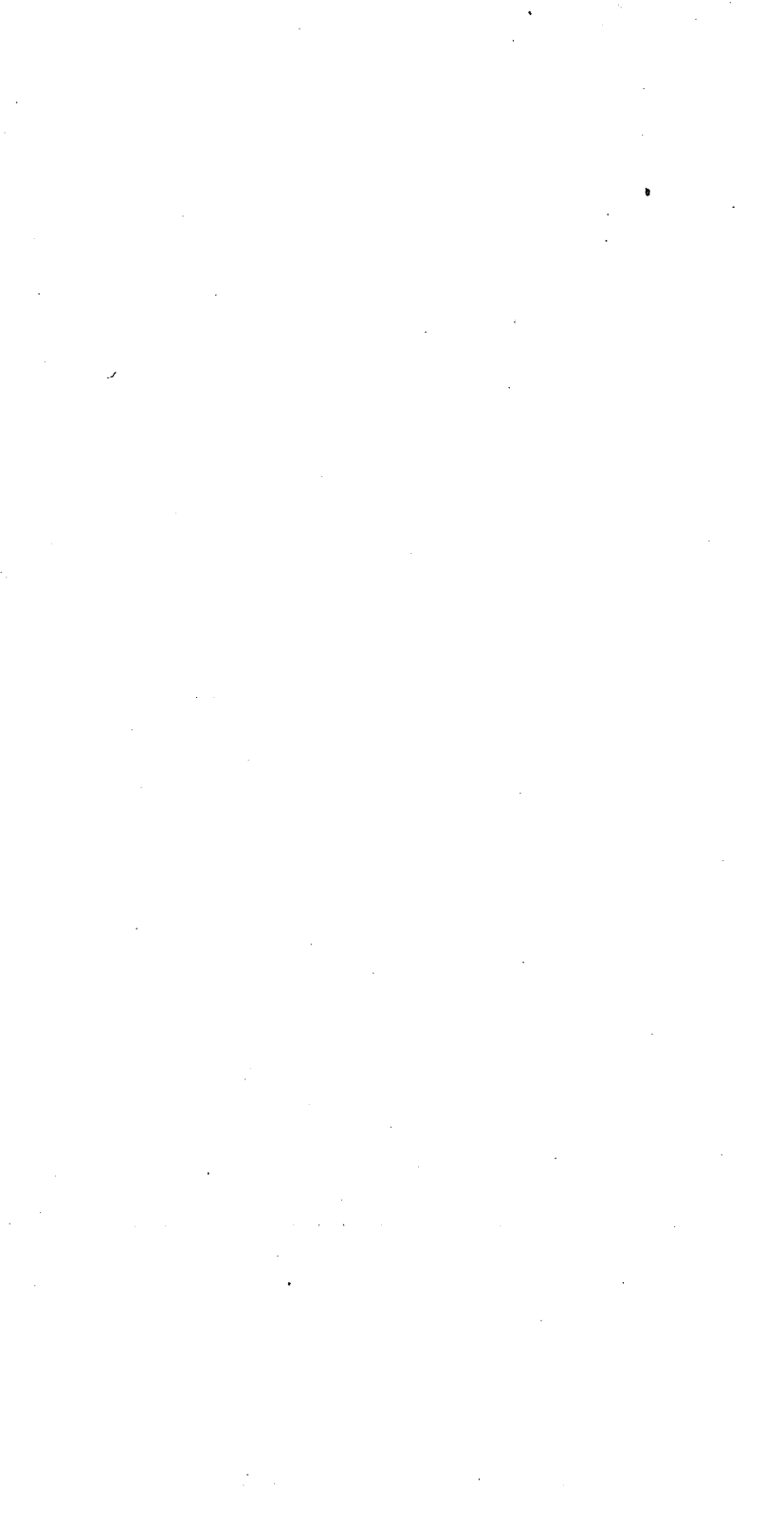
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# SERMON I.

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## THE FIRST PROPHECY.

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GENESIS iii. 15.

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

SUCH is the first prophecy which occurs in Scripture. Adam and Eve had transgressed the simple command of their Maker; they had hearkened to the suggestions of the tempter, and eaten of the forbidden fruit. Summoned into the presence of God, each of the three parties is successively addressed; but the serpent, as having originated evil, receives first his sentence.

We have, of course, no power of ascertaining the external change which the curse brought upon the serpent. The terms, however, of the sentence, “upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life<sup>1</sup>,” seem to imply that the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 14.



serpent had not been created a reptile, but became classed with creeping things, as a consequence of the curse. It is probable that heretofore the serpent had been remarkable for beauty and splendour, and that on this account the tempter chose it as the vehicle of his approaches. Eve, in all likelihood, was attracted towards the creature by its loveliness; and when she found it endowed, like herself, with the power of speech, she possibly concluded that it had itself eaten of the fruit, and acquired thereby a gift which she thought confined to herself and her husband.

But we may be sure, that although, to mark his hatred of sin, God pronounced a curse on the serpent, it was against the devil, who had actuated the serpent, that the curse was chiefly directed. It may be said that the serpent itself must have been innocent in the matter, and that the curse should have fallen on none but the tempter. But you are to remember that the serpent suffered not alone: every living thing had share in the consequences of disobedience. And although the effect of man's apostasy on the serpent may have been more signal and marked than on other creatures, we have no right to conclude, that there was entailed so much greater suffering on this reptile as to distinguish it in misery from the rest of the animal creation.

But undoubtedly it was the devil, more emphatically than the serpent, that God cursed for the seduction of man. The words, indeed, of our text

have a primary application to the serpent. It is most strictly true, that, ever since the fall, there has been enmity between man and the serpent. Every man will instinctively recoil at the sight of a serpent. We have a natural and unconquerable aversion from this tribe of living things, which we feel not in respect to others, even fiercer and more noxious. Men, if they find a serpent, will always strive to destroy it, bruising the head in which the poison lies; whilst the serpent will often avenge itself, wounding its assailant, if not mortally, yet so as to make it true that it bruises his heel.

But whilst the words have thus, undoubtedly, a fulfilment in respect to the serpent, we cannot question that their reference is chiefly to the devil. It was the devil, and not the serpent, which had beguiled the woman; and it is only in a very limited sense that it could be said to the serpent, "because thou hast done this." We are indeed so unacquainted with transactions in the world of spirits, that we cannot pretend to determine what, or whether any, immediate change passed on the condition of Satan and his associates. If the curse upon the serpent took effect upon the devil, it would seem probable, that, ever since the fall, the power of Satan has been especially limited to this earth and its inhabitants. We may gather from the denunciation, "upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life," that, in place of being allowed, as he might beforetime have been, to range

through the universe, machinating against the peace of many orders of intelligence, he was confined to the arena of humanity, and forced to concentrate his energies on the destruction of a solitary race. It would seem altogether possible, that, after his ejection from heaven, Satan had liberty to traverse the vast area of creation, and that far-off stars and planets were accessible to his wanderings. It is to the full as possible, that as soon as man apostatized, God confirmed in their allegiance other orders of being, and shielded them from the assaults of the evil one, by chaining him to the earth on which he had just won a victory. And if, as the result of his having seduced our first parents, Satan were thus sentenced to confinement to this globe, we may readily understand how words, addressed to the serpent, dooming it to trail itself along the ground, had distinct reference to the tempter by whom that serpent had been actuated.

But, whatever be our opinion concerning this part of the curse, there can be no doubt that our text must be explained of the devil, though, as we have shown you, it has a partial fulfilment in respect of the serpent. We must here consider God as speaking to the tempter, and announcing war between Satan and man. We have called the words a prophecy; and, when considered as addressed to the devil, such is properly their designation. But when we remember that they were spoken in the hearing of Adam and Eve, we must regard them also in the

light of a promise. And it is well worth remark, that, before God told the woman of her sorrow and her trouble, and before he told the man of the thorn, and the thistle, and the dust to which he should return, he caused them to hear words which must have inspired them with hope. Vanquished they were: and they might have thought that, with an undisputed supremacy, he who had prevailed to their overthrow would ever after hold them in vassalage. Must it not then have been cheering to them, whilst they stood as criminals before their God, expecting the sentence which disobedience had provoked, to hear that their conqueror should not enjoy unsassaulted his conquest, but that there were yet undeveloped arrangements which would ensure to humanity final mastery over the oppressor? And though, when God turned and spake to themselves, he gave no word of encouragement, but dwelt only on the toil and the death which they had wrought into their portion, still the prophecy to which they had listened must have sunk into their hearts as a promise; and when, with lingering steps, and the first tears ever wept, they departed from the glorious precincts of Eden, we may believe that one sustained the other by whispering the words, though "thou shalt bruise his heel, it shall bruise thy head."

There can be no doubt that intimations of redemption were given to our guilty parents, and that they were instructed by God to offer sacrifices which should shadow out the method of atonement. And

though it does not of course follow that we are in possession of all the notices mercifully afforded, it seems fair to conclude, as well from the time of delivery as from the nature of the announcement, that our text was designed to convey comfort to the desponding; and that it was received as a message breathing deliverance by those who expected an utter condemnation.

We are not, however, much concerned with the degree in which the prophecy was at first understood. It cannot justly be called an obscure prophecy: for it is quite clear on the fact, that, by some means or another, man should gain advantage over Satan. And though, if considered as referring to Christ, there be a mystery about it, which could only be cleared up by after-events, yet, as a general prediction of victory, it must have commended itself, we think, to the understanding and the heart of those of our race by whom it was first heard.

But whether or no the prophecy were intelligible to Adam and Eve, unto ourselves it is a wonderful passage, spreading itself over the whole of time, and giving outlines of the history of this world from the beginning to the final consummation. We caution you at once against an idea which many have entertained, that the prediction before us refers only, or even chiefly, to the Redeemer. We shall indeed find, as we proceed, that Christ, who was specially the seed of the woman, specially bruised the head of the serpent. But the prophecy is to be

interpreted in a much larger sense. It is nothing less than a delineation of an unwearied conflict of which this earth shall be the theatre, and which shall issue, though not without partial disaster to man, in the complete discomfiture of Satan and his associates. And no man who is familiar with other predictions of Scripture, can fail to find, in this brief and solitary verse, the announcement of those very struggles and conquests which occupy the gorgeous poetry of Isaiah, and crowd the mystic canvass of Daniel and St. John.

We wish you therefore to dismiss, if you have ever entertained, contracted views of the meaning of our text. It must strike you, at the first glance, that though Christ was in a peculiar sense the seed of the woman, the phrase applies to others as well as the Redeemer. We are therefore bound, by all fair laws of interpretation, to consider that the prophecy must be fulfilled in more than one individual; especially as it declares that the woman, as well as her seed, should entertain the enmity, and thus marks out more than a single party as engaging in the conflict.

Now there are one or two preliminary observations which require all your attention, if you hope to enter into the full meaning of the prediction.

We wish you, first of all, to remark particularly the expression, "I will put enmity." The enmity, you observe, had no natural existence: God declares

his intention of putting enmity. As soon as man transgressed, his nature became evil, and therefore he was at peace, and not at war with the devil. And thus, had there been no interference on the part of the Almighty, Satan and man would have formed alliance against heaven, and, in place of a contest between themselves, have carried on nothing but battle with God. There is not, and cannot be, a native enmity between fallen angels and fallen men. Both are evil, and both became evil through apostasy. But evil, wheresoever it exists, will always league against good ; so that fallen angels and fallen men were sure to join in a desperate companionship. Hence the declaration, that enmity should be put, must have been to Satan the first notice of redemption. This lofty spirit must have calculated, that if he could induce men, as he had induced angels, to join in rebellion, he should have them for allies in his every enterprise against heaven. There was nothing of enmity between himself and the spirits who had joined in the effort to dethrone the Omnipotent. At least, whatever the feuds and jarrings which might disturb the rebels, they were linked, as with an iron band, in the one great object of opposing good. So that when he heard that there should be enmity between himself and the woman, he must have felt that some apparatus would be brought to bear upon man ; and that, though he had succeeded in depraving human nature, and thus assi-

milating it to his own, it should be renewed by some mysterious process, and wrought up to the lost power of resisting its conqueror.

And accordingly it has come to pass, that there is enmity on the earth between man and Satan ; but an enmity supernaturally put, and not naturally entertained. Unless God pour his converting grace into the soul, there will be no attempt to oppose Satan, but we shall continue to the end of our days his willing captives and servants. And therefore it is God who puts the enmity. Introducing a new principle into the heart, he causes conflict where there had heretofore been peace, inclining and enabling man to rise against his tyrant. So that, in these first words of the prophecy, you have the clearest intimation that God designed to visit the depraved nature with a renovating energy. And now, whensoever you see an individual delivered from the love, and endowed with a hatred of sin, resisting those passions which held naturally sway within his breast, and thus grappling with the fallen spirit which claims dominion upon earth, you are surveying the workings of a principle which is wholly from above ; and you are to consider that you have before you the fulfilment of the declaration, “ I will put enmity between thee and the woman.”

We go on to observe that the enmity, being thus a superhuman thing, implanted by God and not generated by man, will not subsist universally, but only in particular cases. You will have seen, from



our foregoing showings, that a man must be renewed in order to his fighting with Satan ; so that God's putting the enmity is God's giving saving grace. The prophecy cannot be interpreted as declaring that the whole human race should be at war with the devil : the undoubted matter-of-fact being that only a portion of the race resumes its loyalty to Jehovah. And we are bound, therefore, before proceeding further with our interpretation, to examine whether this limitation is marked out by the prediction—whether, that is, we might infer, from the terms of the prophecy, that the placed enmity would be partial, not universal.

Now we think that the expression, “thy seed and her seed,” shows at once that the enmity would be felt by only a part of mankind. The enmity is to subsist not merely between Satan and the woman, but between his seed and her seed. But the seed of Satan can only be interpreted of wicked men. Thus Christ said to the Jews, “Ye are of your father, the devil ; and the lusts of your father ye will do <sup>1</sup>.” Thus also, in expounding the parable of the tares and the wheat, he said, “the tares are the children of the wicked one <sup>2</sup>.” There is, probably, the same reference in the expression, “O generation of vipers.” And, in like manner, you find St. John declaring, “he that committeth sin is of the devil <sup>3</sup>.” Thus,

<sup>1</sup> John viii. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiii. 38.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John iii. 8.

then, by the seed of Satan we understand wicked men, those who resist God's Spirit, and obstinately adhere to the service of the devil. And if we must interpret the seed of Satan of a portion of mankind, it is evident that the prophecy marks not out the enmity as general, but indicates just that limitation which has been supposed in our preceding remarks.

But then the question occurs, how are we to interpret the woman and her seed? Such expression seems to denote the whole human race. What right have we to limit it to a part of that race? We reply, that it certainly does not denote the whole human race: for if you interpret it literally of Eve and her descendants, Adam, at least, is left out, who was neither the woman nor her seed. But without insisting on the objection under this form, fatal as it is to the proposed interpretation, we should not be warranted, though we have no distinct account of the faith and repentance of Adam, in so explaining a passage as to exclude our common forefather from final salvation. You must see, that, if we take literally the woman and her seed, no enmity was put between Adam and Satan; for Adam was neither the woman nor the seed of the woman. And if Adam continued in friendship with Satan, it must be certain that he perished in his sins: a conclusion to which we dare not advance without scriptural testimony the most clear and explicit.

We cannot, then, understand the woman and her seed, as Eve and her natural descendants. We must

rather believe, that, as the seed of the serpent is to be interpreted spiritually and symbolically, so also is the seed of the woman. And when you remember that Eve was a signal type of the Church, there is an end of the difficulties by which we seem met. You know, from the statement of St. Paul to the Romans, that Adam was the figure of Christ<sup>1</sup>. Now it was his standing to Eve in the very same relationship in which Christ stands to the Church, which specially made Adam the figure of Christ. The side of Adam had been opened, when a deep sleep fell on him, in order that Eve might be formed, an extract from himself. And thus, as Hooker saith, "God frameth the Church out of the very flesh, the very wounded and bleeding side of the Son of man. His body crucified, and his blood shed for the life of the world, are the true elements of that heavenly Being which maketh us such as himself is, of whom we come. For which cause the words of Adam may be fitly the words of Christ concerning his Church, 'flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bones.'" We cannot go at length into the particulars of the typical resemblance between Eve and the Church. It is sufficient to observe, that, since Adam the husband of Eve was the figure of Christ, and since Christ is the husband of the Church, it seems naturally to follow that Eve was the figure or type of the Church. And when we have established this typical character

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 14.

of Eve, it is easy to understand who are meant by the woman and her seed. The true Church of God in every age—whether you consider it as represented by its head, which is Christ; whether you survey it collectively as a body, or resolve it into its separate members—this true Church of God must be regarded as denoted by the woman and her seed. And though you may think—for we wish, as we proceed, to anticipate objections—that, if Eve be the Church, it is strange that her seed should be also the Church, yet it is the common usage of Scripture to represent the Church as the mother, and every new convert as a child. Thus, in addressing the Jewish Church, and describing her glory and her greatness in the latter days, Isaiah saith, “thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.” And again—contrasting the Jewish and Gentile Churches—“more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.” So that, although the Church can be nothing more than the aggregate of individual believers, the inspired writers commonly describe the Church as a parent, and believers as the offspring; and in understanding, therefore, the Church and its members by the woman and her seed, we cannot be advocating a forced interpretation.

And now we have made a long advance towards the thorough elucidation of the prophecy. We have shown you, that, inasmuch as the enmity is supernaturally put, it can only exist in a portion of man-

kind. We then endeavoured to ascertain this portion: and we found that the true Church of God in every age comprehends all those who war with Satan and his seed. So that the representation of the prediction—a representation whose justice we have yet to examine—is simply that of a perpetual conflict, on this earth, between wicked angels and wicked men on the one side, and the Church of God, or the company of true believers, on the other; such conflict, though occasioning partial injury to the Church, always issuing in the discomfiture of the wicked.

We now set ourselves to demonstrate the accuracy of this representation. We have already said that there are three points of view in which the Church may be regarded. We may consider it, first, as represented by its head, which is Christ; secondly, collectively as a body; thirdly, as resolved into its separate members. We shall endeavour to show you briefly, in each of these cases, the fidelity of the description, “it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Now the enmity was never put in such overpowering measure, as when the man Christ Jesus was its residence. It was in Christ Jesus in one sense naturally, and in another supernaturally. He was born pure, and with a native hatred of sin; but then he had been miraculously generated, in order that his nature might be thus hostile to evil. And never did there move the being on this earth who hated sin with as perfect a hatred, or who was as odious in

return to all the emissaries of darkness. It was just the holiness of the Mediator which stirred up against him all the passions of a profligate world, and provoked that fury of assault which rushed in from the hosts of reprobate spirits. There was thrown a perpetual reproach on a proud and sensual generation, by the spotlessness of that righteous individual, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth<sup>1</sup>." And if he had not been so far separated, by the purities of life and conversation, from all others of his nature; or if vice had received a somewhat less tremendous rebuke from the blamelessness of his every action; we may be sure that his might and benevolence would have gathered the nation to his discipleship, and that the multitude would never have been worked up to demand his crucifixion.

The great secret of the opposition to Christ lay in the fact, that he was not such an one as ourselves. We are accustomed to think that the lowliness of his condition, and the want of external majesty and pomp moved the Jews to reject their Messiah: yet it is by no means clear that these were, in the main, the producing causes of rejection. If Christ came not with the purple and circumstance of human sovereignty, he displayed the possession of a supernatural power, which, even on the most carnal calculation, was more valuable, because more effective, than the staunchest apparatus of earthly supremacy.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 22.

The peasant, who could work the miracles which Christ worked, would be admitted, on all hands, to have mightier engines at his disposal, than the prince who is clothed with the ermine, and followed by the warriors. And if the Jews looked for a Messiah who would lead them to mastery over enemies, then, we contend, there was every thing in Christ to induce them to give him their allegiance. The power which could vanquish death by a word might cause hosts to fall, as fell the hosts of Sennacherib ; and where then was the foe who could have resisted the leader ?

We cannot, therefore, think that it was merely the absence of human pageantry which moved the great ones of Judea to throw scorn upon Jesus. It is true they were expecting an earthly deliverer. But Christ displayed precisely those powers, which, wielded by Moses, had prevailed to deliver their nation from Egypt ; and assuredly then, if that strength dwelt in Jesus which had discomfited Pharaoh, and broken the thralldom of centuries, it could not have been the proved incapacity of effecting temporal deliverance which induced Pharisees and Scribes to reject their Messiah. They could have tolerated the meanness of his parentage ; for that was more than compensated by the majesty of his power. They could have endured the lowliness of his appearance ; for they could set against it his evident communion with divinity.

But the righteous fervour with which Christ de-

nounced every abomination in the land; the untainted purity by which he shamed the “whited sepulchres” who deceived the people by the appearance of sanctity; the rich loveliness of a character in which zeal for God’s glory was unceasingly uppermost; the beautiful lustre which encompassed a being who could hate only one thing, but that one thing sin; these were the producing causes of bitter hostility; and they who would have hailed the wonder-worker with the shout and the plaudit, had he allowed some licence to the evil passions of our nature, gave him nothing but the sneer and the execration, when he waged open war with lust and hypocrisy.

And thus it was that enmity, the fiercest and most inveterate, was put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The serpent himself came to the assistance of his seed; evil angels conspired with evil men; and the whole energies of apostasy gathered themselves to the effort of destroying the champion of God and of truth. Yea, and for a while success seemed to attend the endeavour. There was a bruising of the heel of the seed of the woman. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not<sup>1</sup>.” Charged only with an embassy of mercy; sent by the Father—not to condemn the world, though rebellion had overspread its provinces, and there was done the foulest despite to God, in its

<sup>1</sup> John i. 11.



every section, and by its every tenant—but that the world through him might have life; he was, nevertheless, scorned as a deceiver, and hunted down as a malefactor. And if it were a bruising of the heel that he should be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief<sup>1</sup>”; that a nation should despise him, and friends deny and forsake and betray him; that he should be buffeted with temptation, convulsed by agony, lacerated by stripes, pierced by nails, crowned with thorns; then was the heel of the Redeemer bruised by Satan; for to all this injury the fallen angel instigated and nerved his seed. But though the heel was bruised, this was the whole extent of effected damage. There was no real advantage gained over the Mediator: on the contrary, whilst Satan was in the act of bruising Christ’s heel, Christ was in the act of bruising Satan’s head. The Saviour, indeed, exposed himself to every kind of insult and wrong. Whilst enduring “the contradiction of sinners against himself<sup>2</sup>,” it is not to be denied that a strange result was brought round by the machinations of the evil one; for suffering, which is the attendant on sinfulness, was made to empty all its pangs into the bosom of innocence. And seeing that his holiness should have exempted his humanity from all kinsmanship with sorrow and anguish, we are free to allow that the heel was bruised, when pain found entrance into this humanity, and grief,

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 3.

heavier than had oppressed any being of our race, weighed down his over-wrought spirit.

But then there was not an iota of his sufferings which went not towards liquidating the vast debt which man owed to God, and which, therefore, contributed not to our redemption from bondage. There was not a pang by which the Mediator was torn, and not a grief by which his soul was disquieted, which helped not on the achievement of human deliverance, and which, therefore, dealt not out a blow to the despotism of Satan. So that, from the beginning, the bruising of Christ's heel was the bruising of Satan's head. In prevailing, so far as he did prevail, against Christ, Satan was only effecting his own discomfiture and downfall. He touched the heel, he could not touch the head of the Mediator. If he could have seduced him into the commission of evil; if he could have profaned, by a solitary thought, the sanctuary of his soul; then it would have been the head which he had bruised; and rising triumphant over man's surety, he would have shouted, "Victory!" and this creation have become for ever his own. But whilst he could only cause pain, and not pollution; whilst he could dislocate by agony, but not defile by impurity; he reached indeed the heel, but came not near the head; and, making the Saviour's lifetime one dark series of afflictions, weakened, at every step, his own hold upon humanity.

And when, at last, he so bruised the heel as to nail Christ to the cross, amid the loathings and re-

vilings of the multitude, then it was that his own head was bruised, even to 'the being crushed. "Through death," we are told, "Christ Jesus destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil<sup>1</sup>." He fell indeed; and evil angels, and evil men, might have thought him for ever defeated. But in grasping this mighty prey, death paralysed itself; in breaking down this temple, Satan demolished his own throne. It was, as ye all know, by dying, that Christ finished the achievement which, from all eternity, he had covenanted to undertake. By dying, he reinstated fallen man in the position from which he had been hurled. Death came against the Mediator; but, in submitting to it, Christ, if we may use such image, seized on the destroyer, and waving the skeleton-form as a sceptre over this creation, broke the spell of a thousand generations, dashing away the chains, and opening the graves, of an oppressed and rifled population. And when he had died, and descended into the grave, and returned without seeing corruption, then was it made possible that every child of Adam might be emancipated from the dominion of evil; and, in place of the woe and the shame which transgression had won as the heritage of man, there was the beautiful brightness of a purchased immortality wooing the acceptance of the sons and daughters of our race. The strong man armed had kept his goods in peace; and Satan, having seduced men

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 14.

to be his companions in rebellion, might have felt secure of having them as his companions in torment. But the stronger than he drew nigh, and, measuring weapons with him in the garden and on the cross, received wounds which were but trophies of victory, and dealt wounds which annihilated power. And when bruised indeed, yet only marked with honourable scars which told out his triumph to the loftiest orders of intelligent being, the Redeemer of mankind soared on high, and sent proclamation through the universe, that death was abolished, and the ruined redeemed, and the gates of heaven thrown open to the rebel and the outcast, was there not an accomplishment, the most literal and the most energetic, of that prediction which declared to Satan concerning the seed of the woman, "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel?"

Such is the first and great fulfilment of the prophecy. The Church, represented by its head who was specially the seed of the woman, overthrew the devil in one decisive and desperate struggle, and, though not itself unwounded, received no blow which rebounded not to the crushing its opponent.

We proceed, secondly, to consider the Church collectively as a body. We need scarcely observe that, from the first, the righteous amongst men have been objects of the combined assault of their evil fellows and evil angels. The enmity has been put, and strikingly developed. On the one hand, it has been the endeavour of the Church to vindicate God's

honour, and arrest the workings of wickedness: on the other, it has been the effort of the serpent and his seed to sweep from the earth these upholders of piety. And though the promise has all along been verified, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church, it cannot be denied that a great measure of success has attended the strivings of the adversary. If you only call to mind what fierce persecution has rushed against the righteous; how by one engine or another there has been, oftentimes, almost a thorough extinction of the very name of Christianity; and how, when outwardly there has been peace, tares, sown by the enemy, have sent up a harvest of perilous heresies; you cannot withhold your acknowledgment that Satan has bruised the heel of the Church. But he has done nothing more. If he have hewn down thousands by the sword, and consumed thousands at the stake, thousands have sprung forward to fill up the breach; and if he have succeeded in pouring forth a flood of pestilential doctrine, there have arisen staunch advocates of truth who have stemmed the torrent, and snatched the articles of faith, uninjured, from the deluge. There has never been the time when God has been left without a witness upon earth. And though the Church has often been sickly and weak; though the best blood has been drained from her veins, and a languor, like that of moral palsy, has settled on her limbs; still life hath never been wholly extinguished; but, after a while, the sinking energies have been

marvellously recruited, and the worn and wasted body has risen up more athletic than before, and displayed to the nations all the vigour of renovated youth.

So that only the heel has been bruised. And since, up to the second advent of the Lord, the Church shall be battered with heresy, and persecution, and infidelity, we look not, under the present dispensation, for discontinuance of this bruising of the heel. Yet, while Satan is bruising the Church's heel, the Church, by God's help, is bruising Satan's head. The Church may be compelled to prophesy in sackcloth. Affliction may be her portion, as it was that of her glorified head. But the Church is, throughout, God's witness upon earth. The Church is God's instrument for carrying on those purposes which shall terminate in the final setting up of the Mediator's kingdom. And, oh, there is not won over a single soul to Christ, and the Gospel message makes not its way to a single heart, without an attendant effect as of a stamping on the head of the tempter: for a captive is delivered from the oppressor, and to deliver the slave is to defeat the tyrant. Thus the seed of the woman is continually bruising the head of the serpent. And whensoever the Church, as an engine in God's hands, makes a successful stand for piety and truth; whensoever, sending out her missionaries to the broad waste of heathenism, she demolishes an altar of superstition, and teaches the pagan to cast his idols to the mole

and the bat ; or whensoever, assaulting mere nominal Christianity, she fastens men to practice as the alone test of profession ; then does she strike a blow which is felt at the very centre of the kingdom of darkness, and then is she experiencing a partial fulfilment of the promise, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly<sup>1</sup>."

And when the fierce and on-going conflict shall be brought to a close ; when this burdened creation shall have shaken off the slaves and the objects of concupiscence, and the Church of the living God shall reign, with its head, over the tribes and provinces of an evangelized earth ; then, in the completeness of the triumph of righteousness, shall be the completeness of the serpent's discomfiture. And as the angel and the archangel contrast the slight injury which Satan could ever cause to the Church, with that overwhelming ruin which the Church has, at last, hurled down upon Satan ; as they compare the brief struggle and the everlasting glory of the one with the shadowy success and the never-ending torments of the other ; will they not decide, and tell out their decision in language of rapture and admiration, that if ever prediction were fulfilled to the very letter, it is that which, addressed to the serpent, and describing the Church as the seed of the woman, declared, "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel?"

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xvi. 20.

Such is the second fulfilment of the prophecy of our text. The Church, considered collectively as a body, is so assaulted by the serpent and his seed, that its heel is bruised: but even now it offers such resistance to evil, and hereafter it shall triumph so signally over every opponent, that the prediction, "it shall bruise thy head," must be received as destined to a literal accomplishment.

We have yet to notice the third fulfilment. We may resolve the Church into its separate members, and taking each individual believer as the seed of the woman, show you how our text is realized in his experience.

Now if there be enmity between the serpent and the Church generally, of course there is also between the serpent and each member of that Church. We have already given it as the description of a converted man, that he has been supernaturally excited to a war with the devil. Whilst left in the darkness and alienation of nature, he submits willingly to the dominion of evil: evil is his element, and he neither strives nor wishes for emancipation. But when the grace of God is introduced into his heart, he will discern quickly the danger and hatefulness of sin, and will yield himself, in a higher strength than his own, to the work of resisting the serpent. Thus enmity is put between the believer and the serpent and his seed. Let a man give himself to the concerns of eternity; let him, in good earnest, set about the business of the



soul's salvation; and he will, assuredly, draw upon himself the dislike and opposition of a whole circle of worldly acquaintance, so that his over-preciseness and austerity will become subject of ridicule in his village or neighbourhood. We quite mistake the nature both of Christianity and of man, if we suppose that opposition to religion can be limited to an age or a country. Persecution, in its most terrible forms, is only the development of a principle which must unavoidably exist until either Christianity or human nature be altered. There is a necessary repugnance between Christianity and human nature. The two cannot be amalgamated: one must be changed before it will combine with the other. And we fear that this is, in a degree, an overlooked truth, and that men are disposed to assign persecution to local or temporary causes. But we wish you to be clear on the fact, that "the offence of the cross"<sup>1</sup> has not ceased, and cannot cease. We readily allow that the form, under which the hatred manifests itself, will be sensibly affected by the civilization and intelligence of the age. In days of an imperfect refinement and a scanty literature, you will find this hatred unsheathing the sword, and lighting the pile. But when human society is at a high point of polish and knowledge, and the principles of religious toleration are well understood, there is perhaps, comparatively, small likelihood that savage violence will be

<sup>1</sup> Gal. v. 11.

the engine employed against godliness. Yet there are a hundred batteries which may and will be opened upon the righteous. The follower of Christ must calculate on many sneers, and much reviling. He must look to meet often with coldness and contempt, harder of endurance than many forms of martyrdom; for the courage which could march to the stake may be daunted by a laugh. And, frequently, the opposition assumes a more decided shape. The parent will act harshly towards the child; the superior withdraw his countenance from the dependent; and all because of a giving heed to the directions of Scripture. Religion, as though it were rebellion, alienates the affections, and alters the wills, of fathers and guardians. So that we tell an individual that he blinds himself to plain matters of fact, if he espouse the opinion that the apostle's words applied only to the first ages of Christianity, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution<sup>1</sup>." To "live godly in Christ Jesus" is to have enmity put between yourselves and the seed of the serpent; and you may be assured, that, unless this enmity be merely nominal on your side, it will manifest itself by acts on the other.

Thus the prophecy of our text announces, what has been verified by the history of all ages, that no man can serve God without uniting against himself evil men and evil angels. Evil angels will assault

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 12.

him, alarmed that their prey is escaping from their grasp. Evil men, rebuked by his example, will become agents of the serpent, and strive to wrench him from his righteousness.

But what, after all, is the amount of injury which the serpent and his seed can cause to God's children? Is it not a truth, which can only then be denied when you have cashiered the authority of every page of the Bible, that he who believes upon Christ, and who, therefore, has been adopted through faith into God's family, is certain to be made more than conqueror, and to trample under foot every enemy of salvation? The conflict between a believer and his foes may be long and painful. The Christian may be often forced to exclaim with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death <sup>1</sup>?" Engaged with the triple band of the world, the flesh, and the devil, he will experience many partial defeats, and, surprised off his guard, or wearied out with watchings, will yield to temptation, and so fall into sin. But it is certain, certain as that God is omnipotent and faithful, that the once justified man shall be enabled to persevere to the end; to persevere, not in an idle dependence on privileges, but in a struggle which, if for an instant interrupted, is sure to be vehemently renewed. And, therefore, the bruising of the heel is the sum-total of the mischief. Thus much, undoubtedly, the serpent

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 24.

can effect. He can harass with temptation, and occasionally prevail : but he cannot undo the radical work of conversion. He cannot eject the principle of grace, and he cannot, therefore, bring back the man into the condition of his slave or his subject. Thus he cannot wound the head of the new man. He may diminish his comforts. He may impede his growth in holiness. He may inject doubts and suspicions, and thus keep him disquieted, when, if he would live up to his privileges, he might rejoice and be peaceful. But all this—and we show you here the full sweep of the serpent's power—still leaves the man a believer ; and, therefore, all this, though it bruise the heel, touches not the head.

And though the believer, like the unbeliever, must submit to the power of death, and tread the dark valley of that curse which still rests on our nature, is there experienced more than a bruising of the heel in the undergoing this dissolution of humanity ? It is an injury—for we go not with those who would idolize or soften down death—that the soul must be detached from the body, and sent out, a widowed thing, on the broad journeyings of eternity. It is an injury, that this curious framework of matter, as much redeemed by Christ as the giant-guest which it encases, must be taken down, joint by joint, and rafter by rafter, and, resolved into its original elements, lose every trace of having been human. But what, we again say, is the extent of this injury ? The

foot of the destroyer shall be set upon the body, and he shall stamp till he have ground it into powder, and dispersed it to the winds. But he cannot annihilate a lonely particle. He can put no arrest on that germinating process which shall yet cause the valleys and mountains of this globe to stand thick with a harvest of flesh. He cannot hinder my resurrection. And when the soul, over which he hath had no power, rushes into the body which he shall be forced to resign, and the child of God stands forth a man, yet immortal, compound of flesh and spirit, but each pure, each indestructible;—oh, though Satan may have battered at his peace during a long earthly pilgrimage; though he may have marred his happiness by successful temptation; though he may have detained for centuries his body in corruption; will not the inflicted injury appear to have been so trivial and insignificant, that a bruising of the heel, in place of falling short of the matter-of-fact, shall itself seem almost an overwrought description?

And all the while, though Satan can only bruise the believer's heel, the believer is bruising Satan's head. If the believer be one who fights the serpent, and finally conquers, by that final conquest the serpent's head is bruised. If he be naturally the slave of the serpent; if he rebel against the tyrant, throw off his chains and vanquish him, fighting inch by inch the ground to freedom and glory, then he bruises the serpent's head. If two beings are anta-

gonists, he who decisively overcomes bruises the head of his opponent. But the believer and the serpent are antagonists. The believer gains completely the mastery over the serpent. And, therefore, the result of the contest is the fulfilment of the prediction, that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. Oh, if, as we well know, the repentance of a single sinner send a new and exquisite delight down the ranks of the hosts of heaven, and cause the sweeping of a rich and glorious anthem from the countless harps of the sky, can we doubt that the same event spreads consternation through the legions of fallen spirits, and strikes like a death-blow on their haughty and malignant leader? Ay, and we believe that never is Satan so taught his subjugated estate, as when a soul, which he had counted as his own, escapes "as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers<sup>1</sup>," and seeks and finds protection in Jesus. If it be then that Christ sees "of the travail of his soul<sup>2</sup>," it must be then that the serpent tastes all the bitterness of defeat. And when the warfare is over, and the spirit which he hath longed to destroy soars away, convoyed by the angels which wait on the heirs of salvation, must it not be then that the consciousness of lost mastery seizes, with crushing force, on the proud foe of our race; and does not that fierce cry of disappointment which seems to follow the ascending soul, causing her to feel herself only

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxxiv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. liii. 11.

“scarcely saved<sup>1</sup>,” testify that, in thus winning a heritage of glory, the believer hath bruised the head of the serpent?

We shall not examine further this third fulfilment of the prophecy of our text. But we think that when you contrast the slight injury which Satan at the worst can cause to a believer, with the mighty blow which the deliverance of a believer deals out to Satan; the nothingness, at last, of the harm done to God’s people, with that fearful discomfiture which their individual rescue fastens on the devil; you will confess, that considering the Church as resolved into its separate members, just as when you survey it collectively as a body, or as represented by its head, there is a literal accomplishment of this prediction to the serpent concerning the seed of the woman, “it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

We have thus, as we trust, shown you that the prophecy of our text extends itself over the whole surface of time, so that, from the fall of Adam, it has been receiving accomplishment, and will continue being fulfilled until “death and hell are cast into the lake of fire<sup>2</sup>.” It was a wonderful announcement, and, if even but imperfectly understood, must have confounded the serpent, and cheered Adam and Eve. Dust shalt thou eat, foe of humankind, when this long oppressed creation is delivered from thy

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xx. 14.

despotism. As though to mark to us that there shall be no suspension of the doom of our destroyer, whilst this earth rejoices in the restitution of all things, Isaiah, in describing millennial harmony, still leaves the serpent under the sentence of our text: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and *dust shall be the serpent's meat*<sup>1</sup>." There comes a day of deliverance to every other creature, but none to the serpent. Oh, mysterious dealing of our God! that for fallen angels there hath been no atonement, for fallen men a full, perfect, and sufficient. They were far nobler than we, of a loftier intelligence and more splendid endowment; yet ("how unsearchable are his judgments!") we are taken and they are left. "For verily he taketh not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold"<sup>2</sup>.

And shall we, thus singled out and made objects of marvellous mercy, refuse to be delivered, and take our portion with those who are both fallen and unredeemed? Shall we eat the dust, when we may eat of "the bread which cometh down from heaven"<sup>3</sup>? Covetous man! thy money is the dust; thou art eating the serpent's meat. Sensual man! thy gratifications are of the dust; thou art eating the serpent's meat. Ambitious man! thine honours are of the dust; thou art eating the serpent's meat. O God, put enmity between us and the serpent. Will

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lxv. 25.<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 16, marginal reading.<sup>3</sup> John vi. 50.



ye, every one of you, use that short prayer ere ye lie down to rest this night, O God, put enmity between us and the serpent? If ye are not at enmity, his folds are round your limbs. If ye are not at enmity, his sting is at your heart. But if ye will henceforward count him a foe, oppose him in God's strength, and attack him with "the sword of the Spirit<sup>1</sup>;" then, though ye may have your seasons of disaster and depression, the promise stands sure that ye shall finally overcome; and it shall be proved by each one in this assembly, that, though the serpent may bruise the heel of the seed of the woman, yet, at last, the seed of the woman always bruises the head of the serpent.

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians vi. 17.

## SERMON II.

CHRIST THE MINISTER OF THE CHURCH.

HEBREWS viii. 2.

“A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.”

THE discourse of the Apostle here turns on Jesus, the high priest of our profession, whose superiority to Aaron and his descendants he had established by most powerful reasoning. In the verse preceding our text he takes a summary of the results of his argument, deciding that we have such an high priest as became us, and who had passed from the scene of earthly ministrations to “the throne of the majesty in the heavens.” He then, in the words upon which we are to meditate, gives a description of this high priest as at present discharging sacerdotal functions. He calls him “a minister of the sanctuary,” or (according to the marginal reading) of holy things, “and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.” We think it needful, if we would enter into the meaning of this passage, that we confine it to what Christ is, and attempt not to extend it to what Christ was. If you examine the verses which follow,

you will be quite satisfied that St. Paul had in view those portions of the mediatorial work which are yet being executed, and not those which were completed upon earth. He expressly declares, that if the Redeemer were yet resident amongst men, he would not be invested with the priestly office—thus intimating, and that not obscurely, that the priesthood now enacted in heaven was that on which he wished to centre attention.

We know indeed that parts of the priestly office, most stupendous and most important, were discharged by Jesus whilst sojourning on earth. Then it was that, uniting mysteriously in his person the offerer and the victim, he presented himself, a whole burnt-sacrifice, to God, and took away, by his one oblation, the sin of an over-burdened world. But if you attend closely to the reasoning of St. Paul, you will observe that he considers Christ's oblation of himself as a preparation for the priestly office, rather than as an act of that office. He argues, in the third verse, that since "every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices," there was a "necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer." And by then speaking of Christ's having obtained "a more excellent ministry," he plainly implies that what he offers as high priest is offered in heaven, and must, therefore, have been rather procured, than presented, by the sacrifice of himself.

We are anxious that you should clearly perceive—as we are sure you must from the study of the con-

text—that Christ in heaven, and not Christ on earth, is sketched out by the words which we are now to examine. The right interpretation of the description will depend greatly on our ascertaining the scene of ministration. And we shall not hesitate, throughout the whole of our discourse, to consider the apostle as referring to what Christ now performs on our behalf; taking no other account of what he did in his humiliation than as it stands associated with what he does in his exaltation.

You will observe, at once, that the difficulty of our text lies in the assertion, that Christ is “a minister of the *true tabernacle*, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” Our main business, as expounders of Scripture, is with the determining what this “true tabernacle” is. For, though we think it ascertained that heaven is the scene of Christ’s priestly ministrations, this does not define what the tabernacle is wherein he ministers.

Now there can be but little question, that, in another passage of this Epistle to the Hebrews, the humanity of the Son of God is described as “a tabernacle, not made with hands.” The verse occurs in the ninth chapter, in which St. Paul shows the temporary character of the Jewish tabernacle, every thing about it having been simply “a figure for the time then present.” Advancing to the contrast of what was enduring with what was transient, he declares that Christ had come, “an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle,

not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building<sup>1</sup>." It scarcely admits of debate that the body of the Redeemer, produced as it was by a supernatural operation, constituted this tabernacle in which he came down to earth. And we are rightly anxious to uphold this, which seems the legitimate interpretation, because heretics, who would bring down the Saviour to a level with ourselves, find the greatest difficulty in getting rid of the miraculous conception, and are most perplexed by any passage which speaks of Christ as superhumanly generated. It is a common taunt with the Socinian, that the apostles seem to have known nothing of this miraculous conception, and that a truth of such importance, if well ascertained, would not have been omitted in their discussions with unbelievers. We might, if it consisted with our subject, advance many reasons to prove it most improbable, that, either in arguing with gainsayers, or in building up believers, the first preachers of Christianity would make frequent use of the mystery of Christ's generation. But, at all events, we contend that one decisive mention is of the same worth as many, and that a single instance of apostolic recognition of the fact suffices for the overthrow of the heretical objection. And, therefore, we would battle strenuously for the interpretation of the passage to which we have referred, defining the humanity of the Saviour as a "tabernacle not made with

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews ix. 11.

hands, that is to say, not of this building." And if, without any overstraining of the text, it should appear that "the true tabernacle," whereof Christ is the minister, may also be expounded of his spotless humanity, we should gladly adopt the interpretation, as sustaining us in our contest with impugnors of his divinity.

There is, at first sight, so much resemblance between the passages, that we are naturally inclined to claim for them a sameness of meaning. In the one, the tabernacle is described as that "which the Lord pitched, and not man;" in the other, as "not made with hands," that is to say, "not of this building." It is scarcely possible, that the coincidence could be more literal; and the inference seems obvious, that, the latter tabernacle being Christ's humanity, so also must be the former. Yet a little reflection will suggest, that however correct the expression, that Christ's humanity was the tabernacle by, or in, which he came, there would be much of harshness in the figure, that this humanity is the tabernacle of which he is the minister. Without doubt, it is in his human nature that the Son of God officiates above. He carried up into glory the vehicle of his sufferings, and made it partaker of his triumphs. And our grand comfort in the priesthood of Jesus results from the fact that he ministers as a man; nothing else affording ground of assurance that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of

our infirmities<sup>1</sup>." But whilst certain, and rejoicing in the certainty, that our intercessor pleads in the humanity, which, undefiled by either actual or original sin, qualified him to receive the outpourings of wrath, we could not, with any accuracy, say that he is the minister of this humanity. It is clear that such expression must define, in some way, the place of ministration. And since humanity was essential to the constitution of Christ's person, we see not how it could be the temple of which he was appointed the minister. At least we must allow, that, in interpreting our text of the human nature of the Son of God, we should lie open to the charge of advocating an unnatural meaning, and of being so bent on upholding a favourite hypothesis, as not to be over-scrupulous as to means of support.

We dismiss, therefore, as untenable, the opinion which our wishes would have led us to espouse, and must seek elsewhere than in the humanity of Christ for "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man." The most correct and simple idea appears to be, that, inasmuch as Christ is the high priest of all who believe upon his name, and inasmuch as believers make up his Church, the whole company of the faithful constitute that tabernacle of which he is here asserted the minister. If we adopt this interpretation, we may trace a fitness and accuracy of expression, which can scarcely fail to assure

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 15.

us of its justice. The Jewish tabernacle, unquestionably typical of the Christian Church, consisted of the outer part and the inner; the one open to the ministrations of inferior priests, the other to those of the high priest alone. Thus the Church, always one body whatever the dispersion of its members, is partly upon earth where Christ's ambassadors officiate, partly in heaven where Christ himself is present. St. Paul, referring to this Church as a household, describes Christ Jesus as him "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named<sup>1</sup>;" intimating that it was no interference with the unity of this family, that some of its members resided above, whilst others remained, as warriors and sufferers, below. So that, in considering Christ's Church as the tabernacle with its holy place, and its holy of holies—the first on earth, the second in heaven—we adhere most rigidly to the type, and, at the same time, preserve harmony with other representations of Scripture.

And when you remember that Christ is continually described as dwelling in his people, and that believers are represented as "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit<sup>2</sup>," there will seem to be none of that objection against this interpretation which we felt constrained to urge against the former. If it be common to represent believers, whether singly or collectively, as the temple of God; and if, at the same time, Christ Jesus, as the high

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. iii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. ii. 22.



priest of our profession, preside at the altar, and hold the censer of this temple; then we suppose nothing far-fetched, we only keep up the imagery of Scripture, when we take the Church as that "true tabernacle" whereof the Redeemer is the minister.

And when we yet further call to mind that to God alone is the conversion of man ascribed throughout Scripture, we see, at once, the truth of the account given of this tabernacle, that the Lord pitched it and not man. Man reared the Jewish tabernacle, and man builded the Jewish temple. But the spiritual sanctuary, of which these were but types and figures, could be constructed by no human architect. A finite power is inadequate to the fashioning and collecting living stones, and to the weaving the drapery of self-denial and obedience. We refer, undividedly, to Deity, the construction of this true tabernacle, the Church. Had there been no mediatorial interference, the spiritual temple could never have been erected. In the work and person of Christ were laid the foundations of this temple. "Behold," saith God, "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone<sup>1</sup>." And on the stone thus laid there would have arisen no superstructure, had not the finished work of redemption been savingly applied, by God's Spirit, to man's conscience. Though redeemed, not a solitary individual would go on to be saved, unless God recreated him after his own likeness. So that, whatever

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxviii. 16.

the breadth which we give to the expression, it must hold good of Christ's Church, that the Lord pitched it, and not man. And it is not more true of Christ's humanity, mysteriously and supernaturally produced, that it was a tabernacle which Deity reared, than of the company of believers born again of the Spirit and renewed after God's image, that they constitute a sanctuary which shows a nobler than mortal workmanship.

Now, upon the grounds thus briefly adduced, we shall consider, through the remainder of our discourse, that "the true tabernacle," whereof Christ is the minister, denotes the whole Church, whether in earth or heaven, of the redeemed made one by union through faith with the Redeemer. But before considering at greater length the senses in which Christ is the minister of this tabernacle, we would remark on his being styled "Minister," and not "High Priest." We shall find in the sequel, that this change of title is too important to be overlooked, and that we must give it our attention, if we would bring out the full meaning of the passage. The word translated "minister" denotes properly any public servant, whatever the duties committed to his care. His office, or his ministry, is any business undertaken for the sake of the commonwealth. Hence, in the New Testament, the word rendered "ministry" is transferred to the public office of the Levites and priests, and afterwards to the sacerdotal office of Christ. We keep the Greek word in our own lan-

guage, but confine it to the business of the sanctuary, describing as "a Liturgy" a formulary of public devotions. When Christ, therefore, is called the minister of the tabernacle, a broader office seems assigned him, than when styled the High Priest. As the High Priest of his Church, he is alone; the functions of the office being such as himself only can discharge. But as the minister of his Church, he is indeed supreme, but not alone; the same title being given to his ambassadors, as when St. Paul describes himself as the "minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God<sup>1</sup>." You will perceive, at once, from this statement, that our text ought not to be expounded as though "Minister" and "High Priest" were identical titles. No force is then attached to a word of whose application to Christ this verse is the solitary instance. Indeed we are persuaded that much of the power and beauty of the passage lies in the circumstance, that Christ is called "the Minister of the true tabernacle," and not the High Priest. If "the true tabernacle" be, as we seem to have ascertained, the whole Church of the redeemed, that part of the Church which is already in glory appears to have no need of Christ as a priest; and we may search in vain for the senses which the passage would bear when applied to this part. But if Christ's *priestly* functions, properly so called, relate not to the Church in heaven, it is altogether possible that his *ministerial* may; so that

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xv. 16.

there is, perhaps, a propriety in calling him the minister of that Church, which there would not be in calling him the High Priest.

We shall proceed, therefore, to explain our text on the two assumptions, for each of which we have shown you a reason. We assume, in the first place, that "the true tabernacle" is the collective Church of the redeemed, whether in earth or heaven : in the second, that the office of minister, though including that of high priest, has duties attached to it which belong specially to itself. These points, you observe, we assume, or take for granted, through the remainder of our discourse ; and we wish them, therefore, borne in mind as ascertained truths.

In strict conformity with these assumptions, we shall now speak to you, in the first place, of Christ as minister of the Church on earth ; in the second place, of Christ as minister of the Church in heaven.

Now it is of first-rate importance that we consider Christ as withdrawn only from the eye of sense, and, therefore, present as truly after a spiritual manner with his Church, as when, in the day of humiliation, he moved visibly upon earth. The lapse of time has brought no interruption of his parting promise to the Apostles, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world <sup>1</sup>." He has provided, by keeping up a succession of men who derive authority, in unbroken series, from the first teachers of the faith,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 20.

for the continued preaching of his word, and administration of his sacraments. And thus he hath been all along the great minister of his Church, delegating, indeed, power to inferior ministers who “have the treasure in earthen vessels<sup>1</sup> ;” but superintending their appointment as the universal bishop, and evangelizing, so to speak, his vast diocese through their instrumentality. We contend that you have no true idea of a Church, unless you thus recognize in its ordinances, not merely the institution of Christ, but his actual and energizing presence. You have no right, when you sit down in the sanctuary, to regard the individual who addresses you as a mere public speaker, delivering an harangue which has precisely so much worth as it may draw from its logic and its language. He is an ambassador from the great head of the Church, and derives an authority from this head which is quite independent of his own worthiness. If Christ remain always the minister of his Church, Christ is to be looked at through his ministering servant, whoever shall visibly officiate. And though there be a great deal preached in which you cannot recognize the voice of the Saviour ; and though the sacraments be administered by hands which seem impure enough to sully their sanctity ; yet do we venture to assert that no man, who keeps Christ steadfastly in view as the “minister of the true tabernacle,” will ever fail to derive profit from a sermon,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 7.

and strength from a communion. The grand evil is, that men ordinarily lose the chief minister in the inferior, and determine beforehand that they cannot be advantaged unless the inferior be modelled exactly to their own pattern. They regard the speaker simply as a man, and not at all as a messenger. Yet the ordained preacher is a messenger, a messenger from the God of the whole earth. His mental capacity may be weak—that is nothing. His speech may be contemptible—that is nothing. His knowledge may be circumscribed—we say not, that is nothing; but we say, that whatever the man's qualifications, he should rest upon his office. And we hold it the business of a congregation, if they hope to find profit in the public duties of the Sabbath, to cast away those personal considerations which may have to do with the officiating individual, and to fix steadfastly their thoughts on the office itself. Whoever preaches, a congregation would be profited, if they sat down in the temper of Cornelius and his friends, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God <sup>1</sup>."

But if a sermon differ from what a Gospel sermon should be, men will determine that Christ could have had nothing to do with its delivery. Now this, we assert, is nothing less than the deposing Christ from the ministry assigned him by our text. We are far enough from declaring that the chief minister puts

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 33.

the false words into the mouth of the inferior. But we are certain, as upon a truth which to deny is to assault the foundations of Christianity, that the chief minister is so mindful of his office, that every man, who listens in faith, expecting a message from above, shall be addressed through the mouth, ay, even through the mistakes and errors, of the inferior. And in upholding this truth, a truth attested by the experience of numbers, we simply contend for the accuracy of that description of Christ which is under review. If, wheresoever the minister is himself deficient and untaught, so that his sermons exhibit a wrong system of doctrine, you will not allow that Christ's Church may be profited by the ordinance of preaching, you clearly argue that the Redeemer has given up his office, and that he can no longer be styled "the minister of the true tabernacle." There is no middle course between denying that Christ is the minister, and allowing that, whatever the faulty statements of his ordained servant, no soul which is hearkening in faith for a word of counsel or comfort shall find the ordinance worthless and be sent away empty.

And from this we obtain our first illustration of our text. We behold the true followers of Christ enabled to find food in pastures which seem barren, and water where the fountains are dry. They obtain indeed the most copious supplies—though, perhaps, even this will not always hold good—when the sermons breathe nothing but truth, and the sacra-

ments are administered by men of tried piety and faith. But when every thing seems against them, so that, on a carnal calculation, you would suppose the services of the Church stripped of all efficacy, then, by acting faith on the head of the ministry, they are instructed and nourished ; though, in the main, the given lesson be falsehood, and the proffered sustenance little better than poison. And if Christ be thus always sending messages to those who listen for his voice ; if he so take upon himself the office of preacher as to constrain even the tongue of error to speak instruction to his people ; and if, over and above this conveyance of lessons by the most unpromising vehicle, he be dispensing abundantly, by his faithful ambassadors, the rich nutriment of sound and heavenly doctrine—every sermon, which speaks truth to the heart, being virtually a homily of Christ delivered by himself, and every sacrament, which transmits grace, an ordinance of Christ superintended by himself,—why, a fidelity the most extraordinary must be allowed to distinguish the description of our text ; and Christ, though removed from visible ministration, has yet so close a concernment with all the business of the sanctuary—uttering the word, sprinkling the water, and breaking the bread, to all the members of his mystical body—that he must emphatically be styled, “a minister of holy things, of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.”

But whilst the office of minister thus includes



duties whose scene of performance is the holy place, there are others which can only be discharged in the holy of holies. These appertain to Christ under his character of High Priest ; no inferior minister being privileged to enter "within the veil." You must, we think, be familiar, through frequent hearing, with the offices of Christ as our intercessor. You know that though he suffered but once, in the last ages of the world, yet, ever living to plead the merits of his sacrifice, he gives perpetuity to the oblation, and applies to the washing away of sin that blood which is as expiatory as in its first warm gushings. In no respect is it more sublimely true than in this, that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The high priests of Aaron's line entered, year by year, into the holiest of all, making continually a new atonement "for themselves and for the errors of the people<sup>1</sup>." But he who was constituted "after the order of Melchisedec," king as well as priest, entered in once, not "by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood<sup>2</sup>," and needed never to return and ascend again the altar of sacrifice. It is not that sin can now be taken away by any thing short of shedding of blood. But intercession perpetuates crucifixion. Christ, as high priest within the veil, so immortalizes Calvary that, though "he liveth unto God," he dies continually unto sin. And thus, "if any man sin, we have," saith St. John, "an

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews ix. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. ix. 12.

advocate with the Father<sup>1</sup>." But of what nature is his advocacy? If you would understand it, you must take the survey of his atonement. It was a mighty exploit which the Mediator effected in the days of humiliation. He arose in the strength of that wondrous coalition of Deity and humanity of which his person was the subject; and he took into his grasp the globe over whose provinces Satan expatiated as his rightful territory; and, by one vast impulse, he threw it back into the galaxy of Jehovah's favour; and angel and archangel, cherubim and seraphim, sang the chorus of triumph at the stupendous achievement.

Now it is of this achievement that intercession perpetuates the results. We wish you to understand thoroughly the nature of Christ's intercession. When Rome had thrown from her the warrior who had led his countrymen to victory, and galled and fretted the proud spirit of her boldest hero; he, driven onward by the demon of revenge, gave himself as a leader where he had before been a conqueror, and, taking a hostile banner into his passionate grasp, headed the foes who sought to subjugate the land of his nativity. Ye remember, it may be, how intercession saved the city. The mother bowed before the son; and Coriolanus, vanquished by tears, subdued by complaints, left the capitol unscathed by battle. Here is a precise instance of what men

<sup>1</sup> 1 St. John ii. 1.

count successful intercession. But there is no analogy between this intercession, and the intercession of Christ. Christ intercedes with justice. But the intercession is the throwing down his cross on the crystal floor of heaven, and thus proffering his atonement to satisfy the demand. Oh, it is not the intercession of burning tears, nor of half-choked utterance, nor of thrilling speech. It is the intercession of a broken body, and of gushing blood—of death, of passion, of obedience. It is the intercession of a giant leaping into the gap, and filling it with his colossal stature, and covering, as with a rampart of flesh, the defenceless camp of the outcasts. So that, not by the touching words and gestures of supplication, but by the resistless deeds and victories of Calvary, the captain of our salvation intercedes: pleading, not as a petitioner who would move compassion, but rather as a conqueror who would claim his trophies.

Hence Christ is “able to save to the uttermost,” on the very ground that “he ever liveth to make intercession<sup>1</sup> ;” seeing that no sin can be committed for which the satisfaction, made upon Calvary, proffers not an immediate and thorough expiation. And if, as the intercessor, or advocate, of his people, Christ Jesus may be said to stand continually at the altar-side ; and if he be momentarily offering up the sacrifice which is momentarily required by their fast-

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews vii. 25.

recurring guilt; is he not most truly a minister of the tabernacle? If, though the shadows of Jewish worship have been swept away, so that, day by day, and year by year, a typical atonement is no longer to be made, the constant commission of sin demand, as it must demand, the constant pouring out of blood; and if, standing not indeed in a material court, and offering not the legal victims, but, nevertheless, officiating in the presence of God, “a lamb as it had been slain<sup>1</sup>,” the Redeemer present the oblation prescribed for every offence and every short-coming; is not the whole business of the tabernacle which man pitched transacted over again, and that too every instant, in the tabernacle which God pitched; and, Christ being the high priest who alone presides over this expiatory process, how otherwise shall we describe him than as the “minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man?”

But once more. We may regard the prayers and praises of real believers as incense burnt in the true tabernacle, and rising in fragrant clouds towards heaven. Yet who knows not that this incense, though it be indeed nothing less than the breathings of the Holy Spirit, is so defiled by the corrupt channel of humanity through which it passes, that, unless purified and etherealized, it can never be accepted of God? The Holy Ghost, as well as Christ Jesus, is said to

<sup>1</sup> Revelation v. 6.

make intercession for us. But these intercessions are of a widely different character. The Spirit pleads not for us as Christ pleads, holding up a cross, and pointing to wounds. The intercession of the Spirit is an intercession made within ourselves, and through ourselves. It is the result of the Spirit's casting himself into our breasts, and there praying for us by instructing us to pray for ourselves. Thus real prayer is the Spirit's breath; and what else is real praise? Real praise is the Spirit's throwing the heart into the tongue; or rather, it is the sound produced, when the Spirit has swept the chords of the soul, and there is a correspondent vibration of the lip. But though prayer and praise be thus, emphatically, the breathings of the Holy Ghost, they ascend not up in their purity, because each of us is compelled to exclaim with Isaiah, "Woe is me, because I am a man of unclean lips<sup>1</sup>!" Even the voice of the interceding Spirit, when proceeding from that tongue which "is a fire, a world of iniquity<sup>2</sup>," penetrates not the holy of holies, unless the Intercessor, who is at God's right hand, give it wings and gain it access. The atmosphere, so to speak, which is round the throne of the Eternal One, must be impervious to the incense burnt in the earthly tabernacle, unless moist with that mysterious dew which was wrung by anguish from the Mediator.

And how then shall we better represent the office

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> St. James iii. 6.

which the Intercessor executes than by saying, that he holds in his hands the censer of his own merits, and, gathering into it the prayers and praises of his Church, renders them a sweet savour acceptable to the Father? Perfumed with the odour of Christ's propitiation, the incense mounts; and God, in his condescension, accepts the offering, and breathes benediction in return. And what then, we again ask, is Christ Jesus but the "minister of the true tabernacle?" If it be the Intercessor who carries our prayers and praises within the veil, and, laying them on the glowing fire of his righteousness, causes a spicy cloud to ascend and cover the mercy-seat; does not this Intercessor officiate in the true tabernacle as did the high priest of old in the figurative? and have we not fresh attestation to the truth of the description, that Jesus is "a minister of holy things, of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man?"

We think that the several particulars thus adduced constitute a strong witness, so far as the Church on earth is concerned, to the accuracy of the definition presented by our text. We have shown you that to all true believers Christ Jesus is literally the minister of the sanctuary, preaching through the preacher, and administering, through his hands, the sacraments. And though we may be thought to have herein somewhat trenched on the office of the Spirit, we have, in no degree, transgressed the statements of Scripture. In the Book of Revelation, it is

Christ who sends, through John, the sermons to the churches, who holds in his right hand the seven stars which represent the ministers of these churches, and who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks which represent the churches themselves. And though, unquestionably, it is the Spirit which carries home the word, the delivery of that word must be referred to the Saviour. Thus, in a somewhat obscure passage of St. Peter, Christ is said to have gone by the Spirit, and “preached unto the spirits in prison<sup>1</sup>.” And certainly what he did to the disobedient, he may justly be affirmed to do to the faithful. We have further shown you, that, as the high priest of his people, Christ offers up continual sacrifice, and burns sweet incense. And when you combine these particulars, you have virtually before you the Saviour in the pulpit of the sanctuary, the Saviour at the altar, the Saviour with the censer; and thus, seeing that he officiates in the whole business of the divinely-pitched tabernacle, will you not confess him the minister of that tabernacle?

But, understanding by the “true tabernacle” the collective Church of the redeemed, whether in heaven or on earth, we have yet to show you that Christ is the minister of the former portion as well as of the latter. You see at once that the “true tabernacle” cannot be what we have all along supposed, unless there be ministerial offices discharged by Christ

<sup>1</sup> 1 St. Peter iii. 19.

towards the saints in glory. And we think that the overlooking the title of minister, or rather the identifying it with that of high priest, has caused the unsatisfactoriness of many commentaries on the passage. As high priest of the spiritual temple, Christ can scarcely be said to execute any functions in which those who have entered into heaven are personally interested. They are beyond the power of sin, and therefore need not sacrifice. The music of their praises is rolled from celestial harps, and requires not to be melodized. But, when we take Christ as the minister, we may observe respects in which, without adventuring on rash speculation, he may be said to discharge the same offices to the Church above and the Church below. We shall not presume to speak of what goes on in the holy of holies, with that confidence which is altogether warrantable, when discourse turns on transactions of which the outer court is the scene. But finding Christ described as the "minister of the true tabernacle," and considering this tabernacle as divided into sections, we only strive to be wise up to what is written, when, observing senses in which the name must be confined to the lower section, we search for others in which it may be extended to the upper.

And if Christ minister to the Church below by discharging the office of preacher or instructor, who shall doubt that he may also thus minister to the Church above? We have already referred to a passage in St. Peter, which speaks of Christ as



having "preached to the spirits." We enter not into the controversies on this passage. But it gives, we think, something of foundation to the opinion, that, whilst his body was in the sepulchre, Christ preached to spirits in the separate state, opening-up to them, probably, those mysteries of redemption into which even angels, beforetime, had vainly striven to look. The kings, and the prophets, and the righteous men, who had desired to see the things which apostles saw, and had not seen them, and to hear the things which they heard, and had not heard them—unto these, it may be, Christ brought a glorious roll of intelligence ; and we can imagine him standing in the midst of a multitude which no man can number, who had all gone down to the chambers of death with but indistinct and far-off glimpses of the promised Messiah, and explaining to the eager assembly the beauty, and the stability, of that deliverance which he had just wrought out through obedience and blood-shedding. And, oh, there must then have gone forth a tide of the very loftiest gladness through the listening crowds of the separate state ; and then perhaps for the first time, admiration and ecstasy summoning out the music, was heard that anthem, whose rich peal rolls down the coming eternity, "Worthy, worthy, worthy, is the Lamb." Then, it may be, for the first time, did Adam embrace all the magnificence of the promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head ; and Abraham understand how the well-being of the human

population depended upon one that should spring from his own loins; and David ascertain all the meaning of mysterious strains, which, as prefiguring Messiah, he had swept from the harp-strings. Then, too, the long train of Aaron's line, who had stood at the altar, and slain the victims, and burnt the incense, almost weighed down by a ritual, the import of whose ceremonies was but indistinctly made known—then, it may be, were they suddenly and sublimely taught the power of every figure, and the expressiveness of every rite; whilst the noble company of prophets, holy men who “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost <sup>1</sup>,” but who, rapt into the future, uttered much which only the future could develope—these, as though starting from the sleep of ages, sprang into the centre of that gorgeous panorama of truth which they had been commissioned to outline, but over whose spreadings there had rested the cloud and the mist; and Isaiah thrilled at the glories of his own saying, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given <sup>2</sup>,” and Hosea grasped all the mightiness of the declaration, which he had poured forth whilst denouncing the apostasies of Samaria, “O Death, I will be thy plagues; O Grave, I will be thy destruction <sup>3</sup>.”

We know not why it may not thus be considered that the day of Christ's entrance into the separate state was like the Pentecostal day to the Church upon earth, a day of the rolling-off of obscurity from

<sup>1</sup> 2 St. Peter i. 21.      <sup>2</sup> Isaiah ix. 6.      <sup>3</sup> Hosea xiii. 14.

the plan of redemption, and of the showing how "glory, honour, and immortality <sup>1</sup>," were made accessible to the remotest of the world's families; a day on which a thousand types gave place to realities, and a thousand predictions leaped into fulfilment; a day, therefore, on which there circulated through the enormous gatherings of Adam and his elect posterity, already ushered into rest, a gladness which had never yet been reached in all the depth of their beatifical repose. And neither, then, can we discover cause why Christ may not be thought to have filled the office of preacher to the buried tribes of the righteous, and thus to have assumed that character which he has never since laid aside, that of "a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man."

We know but little of the condition of separate spirits; but we know, assuredly, from the witness of St. Paul, that they are "present with the Lord <sup>2</sup>." Whatever the dwelling-place which they tenant, whilst awaiting the magnificent things of a resurrection, the glorified humanity of the Saviour is amongst them, and they are privileged to hold immediate communings with their head. Thus the preacher, the mighty expounder of the will and purposes of the Father, moves to and fro through the admiring throng; and the souls of those who have loved and served the Redeemer upon earth are no sooner delivered from the flesh than they stand in the pre-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 8.

sence of that illustrious Being who spake as “never man spake.” Is he silent? Was it only in the day of humiliation, and in the hour of trouble, that he had instruction to impart, and lessons to convey, and deep and glorious secrets to open-up to the faithful? He who described himself as actually “straitened” whilst on earth, who had many things to say which his hearers were not able to bear—think ye that, in a nobler scene, and with spirits before him all whose faculties have been wondrously enlarged and sublimed, he delivers not the homilies of a mightier teaching, and leads not on his people to loftier heights of knowledge, and broader views of truth? Oh, we cannot but believe that the glorified Redeemer converses—though thought cannot scan such mysterious and majestic converse—with those blessed beings who “have washed their robes and made them white<sup>1</sup>” in his blood; that he unfolds to them the wonders of redemption; and teaches them the magnificence of God; and spreads out to their contemplation the freight of splendour wherewith the second Advent is charged; and carries them to Pisgah tops, whence they look down upon the landscapes, burning with the purple and the gold, across which they shall pass when attired in the livery of the resurrection—thus making the place of separate spirits a church, himself the preacher, immortality his text. Yea, when we think on the countless points of difference and debate between men who, in equal sincerity, love the Lord

<sup>1</sup> Rev. vii. 14.

Jesus ; when we observe how those, who alike place all their hopes on the Mediator, hold opposite opinions on many doctrines ; and when we yet further remember that a long lifetime of study and prayer leaves half the Bible unexplored ; there is palpably so much to be unravelled, so much to be elucidated, so much to be learned, that we can suppose the Redeemer, day by day—if days there be where the sun never sets—imparting fresh intelligence to the enraptured assembly, and causing new gladness to go the round of the crowded ranks, as he expounds a difficulty, and justifies the ways of God to man.

And whether or no we be over-bold in even hinting at the possible subject-matter of discourse, we only vindicate the title which our text gives to the Saviour, when we conclude that, as the God-man passes through “the general assembly and church of the first-born<sup>1</sup>,” he wraps not himself up in silence and loneliness ; but that speaking, as he spake with the disciples journeying to Emmaus, he opens wonders, and causes every heart to burn and bound. So that, removed as is the Church within the veil from the ken of our observation, and needing not, as it cannot need, those deeds of an intercessor, which engage chiefly, in our own case, the ministry of Christ, we can yet be confident that in the Holy of Holies there goes onward a grand work of instruction ; and thus ascertaining, that, as a preacher to his people, Christ’s office is not limited to those who sojourn in the flesh,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 23.

we can understand by the "true tabernacle" the Church above conjointly with the Church below, and yet pronounce, unreservedly, of Jesus, that he is "a minister of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man."

Such, brethren, is our account of the title of our text, whether respect be had to believers in glory, or to believers still warring upon earth. If we have dealt correctly with the passage, it furnishes one great practical admonition, already incidentally mentioned, which it will be well that you keep diligently in mind. When you attend the services of the sanctuary, remember who is the minister of that sanctuary. You run to hear this man preach, and then that man. But who amongst you—let me speak it with reverence—comes in the humble, prayerful, faithful hope of hearing Christ preach? Yet Christ is the "minister of the true tabernacle." Christ preaches, through his servants, to those who forget the instrument, and use meekly the ordinance.

It is a melancholy and dispiriting thing to observe how little effect seems wrought by preaching. We take the case of a crowded sanctuary, where the business of listening goes on with a more than common abstraction. We may have before us the rich exhibition of an apparently riveted attention; and the breathless stillness of a multitude shall give witness how they are hanging on the lips of the speaker. And if he grow impassioned, and pour out his oratory on things terribly sublime, the countenances of

hundreds shall betray a convulsion of spirit—and if he speak glowingly of what is tender and beautiful, the sunniness in many eyes shall testify to their feeling an emotion of delightsomeness. But we are not to be carried away by the charms of this spectacle. We know too thoroughly, that, with the closing of the sermon, may come the breaking of the spell; and that it is of all things the most possible, that, if we pursued to their homes these earnest listeners, we should find no proof that impression had been made by the enunciated truths, and, perhaps, no more influential remembrance of the discourse, by whose power they had been borne completely away, than if they had sat fascinated by the loveliness of a melody, or awe-struck at the thunderings of an avalanche.

And the main reason of all this we take to be, that men forget the ordinance, and look only to the instrument. If such be the case, it is no marvel that they derive nothing from preaching but a little animal excitement, and a little head knowledge. If you listen not for the voice of Christ, who shall wonder that you hear only the voice of man, and so go away to your homes with your souls unfed, simply equipped for sitting in judgment upon the sermon as you would upon a tragedy, and ready to begin the review with some caustic remark, which shall prove, that, whatever else you have learned, you have not learned charity?

Alas! the times on which we have fallen are so evil, that there is almost a total losing sight of the

ordinance of a visible Church. Preaching is valued not as Christ's mode of ministering to his people, and, therefore, always to be prized; but as an oratorical display, whose worth, like that of a pleading at the bar, is to be judged by the skill of the argument and the power of the language.

We can but point out to you the error. It must remain with yourselves to strive to correct it. "Cease ye from man<sup>1</sup>." When and where is this injunction so needful as in a church and on a Sabbath? Every thing is made to depend on the clergyman. And men will tell you that he is very good, but very dull; that his doctrine is sound, but his delivery heavy; that he is inanimate, or ungraceful, or flowery, or prosaic. But as to hearing that he is Christ's servant, an instrument in his Master's hands—who meets with this from the Dan to the Beersheba of our Israel? "Cease ye from man." If ye hope to be profited by preaching; if ye would become—and this is a noble thing—independent of the preacher; strive ye diligently to press home upon your minds, as ye draw nigh to the sanctuary, that Jesus Christ is the "minister of the true tabernacle." Thus shall ye be always secure of a lesson, and so be trained gradually for that inner court of the temple where, sitting down with patriarchs, and apostles, and saints, at the feet of the great Preacher himself, you shall learn, and enjoy, immortality.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. ii. 22.



## SERMON III.

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### THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CREATURE-MERIT.

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1 CHRON. xxix. 14.

“For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.”

FULL of years, of riches, and of honours, David, the man after God's own heart, is almost ready to be gathered to his fathers, and to exchange his earthly diadem for one radiant with immortality. Yet, ere he pass into his Maker's temple of the skies, he would provide large store of material for that terrestrial sanctuary, which, though it must not be reared by himself, he knew would be builded by Solomon. The gold and the silver, the onyx stones, and the stones of divers colours, and the marbles, these and other less precious commodities, the Monarch of Israel had heaped together for the work; and now he summons the princes of the congregation to receive in trust the legacy.

Yet it was comparatively but little to bequeath the rich and costly produce of the earth; and David might have felt that a devoted and zealous spirit

outweighed vastly the metal and the jewel. He indeed could leave behind him an abundance of all that was needful for the building in Jerusalem a house for the ark of the covenant; but where was the piety, where the holiness of enterprise, which should call into being the fabric of his wishes?

He will not then lie down in his grave without breathing over the rare and glittering heaps a stirring, yea almost thrilling, appeal; demanding who, amid the assembled multitude, would emulate his example, and consecrate his service, that day, unto the Lord? It augured well for the kingdom of Judea that its great men, and its nobles, answered to the call, as a band of devoted warriors to the trumpet-peal of loyalty. He who had provided rich garniture for the temple's walls, and glorious hymns to echo through its courts, had cause to lift up his voice with gladness and bless the Lord, when the chief of the fathers, and the heads of tribes, offered themselves willingly, and swelled, by the gift of their own possessions, the treasures already devoted to the sanctuary. He had now good earnest that the cherished promise was on the eve of fulfilment; and that though, having himself shed blood, and been a man of war from his youth, it was not fitting that he should rear a dwelling-place for Deity, one who sprang from his own loins should be honoured as the builder of a structure, into which Jehovah would descend with the cloudy majesty of a mystic Shekinah.

But whilst glad of heart and rejoicing, David felt deeply how unworthy he was of the mercies which he had received, and how marvellous was that favour of Deity of which himself and his people had been objects. The nation had come forward, and, with a willing heart, dedicated its treasures to Jehovah. But the king, whilst exulting at such evidence of national piety, knew well that God alone had imparted the disposition to the people, and that, therefore, God must be thanked for what was offered to God. "Now, therefore," saith he, "our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?" Two things, you observe, excited his gratitude and surprise: first, that the people and himself should have so much to offer; secondly, that, over and above the ability, there should be the willingness, to make so costly an oblation. He felt that God had dealt wondrously with Israel in emptying into its lap the riches of the earth, and thus rendering it possible that piles of the precious and the beautiful might be given, at his summons, for the work of the temple. But then he also felt that the land might have groaned beneath the accumulations of wealth; but that, had not the hearts of the people been made willing by God, no fraction of the enormous mass would have been yielded for the building which he longed to see reared. God had given both the substance, and the willingness to consecrate it to his service. And when

David felt the privilege of a temple being allowed to rise in Jerusalem, and, at the same time, remembered how entirely it was of God that there was either the ability, or the readiness, to build the structure; he might well burst into the exclamation, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?" and then add, in the words of our text: "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

You may thus perceive the connexion between the words on which we are to meditate, and those which immediately precede. David, as we have shown you, expressed surprise on two accounts, each of which is indicated by our text. He marvels that God should have blessed the people with such abundance, and explains why he ascribes the abundance to God, by saying, "All things come of thee." But he is also amazed at the condescension of God in giving willingness, as well as ability, to the people. God needed not to receive at the creature's hands; and, therefore, it was pure love which moved him thus to influence the heart. Nothing could be presented to him which was not already his; and might not then David be justly overpowered by the graciousness of God, seeing that, however noble the offering, "*Of thine own* have we given thee," must be the confession by which it was attended?

There will be no necessity, after having thus stated the occasion on which the text was delivered, and the meaning which it originally bore, that we refer

again to the preparations of David for building the temple. It is evident that the words are of most general applicability, and that we need not take account of the circumstances of the individual who first uttered them, when we would interpret their meaning, or extract their lessons. We shall, therefore, proceed to consider the passage as detached from the context, and as thus presenting us with truths which concern equally every age and every individual.

\* We regard the words before us as resisting, with singular power, the notion that a creature can merit. We know not the point in theology which requires to be oftener stated or more carefully established, than the impossibility that a creature should merit at the hands of the Creator. It is not to be controverted that men are disposed to entertain the opinion that creature-merit is possible, so that they have it in their power to effect something deserving recompense from God. They will not indeed always set the point of merit very high. They will rather imitate the Pharisee in the parable, who evidently thought himself meritorious for stopping a degree or two short of being scandalous. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers<sup>1</sup>." But whether it be at a low point, or a lofty, that merit is supposed to commence, every man must own as his natural sentiment that it com-

<sup>1</sup> Luke xviii. 11.

mences at some point; and each one of us, if he have ever probed his own heart, will confess himself prone to the persuasion, that the creature can lay the Creator under obligation. We find ourselves able to deserve well of one another, to confer favours, and to contract debts. And when we carry up our thoughts from the finite to the infinite, we quite forget the total change in the relationship; and we perceive not that the position, in which we stand to our Maker, excludes those deservings which, unquestionably, have place between man and man. Men simply view God as the mightiest of sovereigns, and, knowing it possible to do a favour to their king, conclude it possible to do a favour to their God.

Now it must be of first-rate importance that we ascertain the truth or the falsehood of such a conclusion. The method in which we may look to be saved will greatly vary, according as we admit or deny the possibility of merit. It is quite clear that our moral position, if we cannot merit, must be vastly different from what it is, if we can merit, and that consequently the apparatus of deliverance cannot, in the two cases, be the same. So that it is no point of curious and metaphysical speculation, whether merit be consistent with creatureship. On the contrary, there cannot be a question whose decision involves inferences of greater practical moment. If I can merit, salvation may be partly of debt, and I may earn it as wages. If I cannot merit, salvation must be wholly of grace, and I must receive it as a gift.

And thus every dispute upon justification by faith, every debate in reference to works as a procuring cause of acceptance, would virtually be settled by the settlement of the impossibility of creature-merit. Questions such as these are best determined by reference to first principles. And if you had once demonstrated that merit is inconsistent with creatureship, you would have equally demonstrated that neither faith, nor works, can procure man's salvation in the way of desert; but that, whatever the instrumentality through which justification is effected, justification itself must be wholly of grace.

Now we think, that, in examining the words of our text, we shall find powerful reasons from which to conclude the impossibility of merit. The text may be said to state a fact, and then an inference from that fact. The fact is, that "all things come of God:" the inference is, that a creature can give God nothing which is not already His own. We will examine successively the fact, and the inference; and then apply the passage to the doctrine which we desire to establish.

We are, in the first place, to speak on the stated fact, that all things come of God.

Now there is nothing more wonderful in respect to Deity than that universality of operation which is always ascribed to Him. One grand distinction between the infinite being, and all finite beings, appears to us to be, that the one can be working a thousand things at once, whilst the energies of the others must

confine themselves to one work at one time. If you figure to yourselves the highest of created intelligences, you endow him with a might which leaves immeasurably behind the noblest human powers; but you never think of investing him with the ability of acting, at the same time, on this globe, and on one of those far-off planets which we see travelling around us. You make, in short, the strength of an archangel by multiplying the strength of a man. But, whatever the degree up to which you think it needful to multiply, you never add to the strength the incomprehensible property, that it may be exerting itself, at the same moment, in places between which there is an untravelled separation, and causing its mightiness to be simultaneously felt in the various districts of a crowded immensity. If you even multiplied finite power till you supposed it to become infinite, you would only keep adding to its intense-ness, and would in no degree attribute to it ubiquity. And, however you might suppose this multiplied power capable of wonders which seem to demand the interpositions of Deity, you would still consider that these wonders must be performed in succession; and you would never imagine of the power, that, in the depths of every ocean, and on the surface of every star, it could, at the same instant, be putting forth its magnificent workings.

And thus it is that the Omnipresence of Godhead is that property, which, more than any other, outruns our conceptions. In multiplying power, so to speak,



you never multiply presence. But when you had even wrought up the idea of a power which can create, and annihilate, you would give it one thing to create at once, and one thing to annihilate at once; and you would never suppose it busy equally, in all its glory and all its resistlessness, in every department of an universe, and with every fraction of infinity.

So that the topmost marvel is that "*All things come of God.*" The unapproachable mystery—it is not that God should be in the midst of this sanctuary, and that He should be ministering life to those gathered within its walls—it is, that He should be no more here than He is elsewhere, and no more elsewhere than He is here; and that, with as actual a concentration of energy as though He had no other occupation, He should be supplying our fast-recurring necessities; and yet that, with such a diffusion of presence as causes Him to be equally every where, He should superintend each district of creation, and give out vitality to each order of beings. "*All things come of God.*" It is not merely that all things come of God by original production; all things come of God by after-sustainment. And whether you consider the visible world, or the invisible; whether you extend your thoughts over the unmeasured fields of materialism, or send them to the survey of those countless ranks of intelligence which stretch upwards between yourselves and your Maker—you are bound to the belief, that every spot in the unlimited space,

and every member of the teeming assemblage, requires and receives the operations of Deity; and that if, for a lonely instant, those operations were suspended, worlds would jostle and make a new chaos, while a disastrous bankruptcy of life would succeed to the present exuberance of animation.

So that it is as true of the angelic hosts, moving in their power and their purity, as of ourselves, fallen from immortality, and beggared, and weakened, that "all things come of God." There can be but one independent being, and on that one all others must depend. An independent being must, necessarily, be self-existent, possessing in himself all the well-springs of life, and all the sources of happiness. A being whose existence is derived must, as necessarily, be dependent on the first Author for the after-continuance. A being who could do without God would himself be God; and there needs no argument to prove to you, that, whatever else God could make, he could not make himself. And you must take it, therefore, as a truth which admits not limitation, that "all things come of God;" so that there is not the order of creatures, whether material or immaterial, which stands not, every moment, indebted for every thing to God, or which, however rare its endowments, and however majestic its possessions, could dispense, for one instant, with communications from the fullness of the Almighty, or be thrown on its own energies, without being thrown to darkness and destruction.

And though it suit not our purpose that we should dwell long on the fact that "all things come of God," yet, associated as this fact is with whatsoever is most wonderful in Deity, we may call upon you to admire it, before we proceed to the inference which it furnishes. It is an august and an overpowering thought, that our God should be alike present on every star, and in each of its minutest recesses ; and that, though there be a vast employment of the mechanism of second causes, there is not wrought a beneficial effect, throughout the boundless expansions of creation, whose actual authorship can be referred to any thing short of the great first cause. It is a noble contemplation, though one by which our faculties are presently confounded, that of the whole universe hanging upon Deity ; archangel, and angel, and man, and beast, and worm, receiving momentary supplies from the same inexhaustible fountain ; and every tenant of every system appealing to the common parent to preserve it, each instant, from extinction. Oh, we take it for a cold and withered heart, which is conscious of no unusual and overcoming emotions, when there is told forth the amazing fact, that the God who hearkens to the prayer of the meanest and most despised, and who is verily present, in all his omnipotence, when invoked by the very poorest of the children of calamity, should be actuating, at the same moment, all the machinery of the universe, and inspiring all its animation ; guiding the rollings of every planet, and the leap of every cataract,

and dealing out existence to every thing that breatheth. We say again that it is this property of God, the property of acting every where at once, so that all things come of him, which removes him furthest from companionship with the finite, and makes him inaccessible to all the soarings of the creature. It is the property to which we have nothing analogous amongst ourselves, even on the most reduced and miniature scale. A creature must be local. He must cease to act in one place before he can begin to act in another. But the Creator knows nothing whether of distance or time. Inhabiting sublimely both infinity and eternity, there cannot be the spot in space, nor the instant in duration, when and where he is not equally present. And seeing that he thus occupies the universe, not as being diffused over it, but as existing, in all his integrity, in its every division and subdivision; and seeing, moreover, that he waits not the passage of centuries, but is at "the end from the beginning<sup>1</sup>;" it can be literally true, without exaggeration, and without figure, that "all things come of Him;" whatsoever there is of good being wrought by Him, whatsoever of evil, permitted; the present being of his performance, and the future of his appointment.

And it is worth observing, that, if it must be the confession of every order of being that "all things," whatsoever they possess, "come of God," such con-

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xlv. 10.

fession must be binding, with a double force, upon man. It must be true of us, on the principles which prove it true generally of creatures, that we have nothing which we have not received, and for which, therefore, we stand not indebted to Deity. But then, by our rebellion and apostasy, there was a forfeiture, we say not of rights—for we deny that the creature can have right to any thing from the Creator—but of those privileges which God, in his mercy, conferred on the work of his hands. As a benevolent being, we may be sure that God would not call creatures into existence, and then dismiss them from his care and his guardianship. And though we presume not to say that creatureship gave a positive claim on the Creator, it rendered it a thing on which we might venture to calculate, that, so long as the creature obeyed, the Creator would minister to his every necessity. But, as soon as there was a failure in obedience, it was no longer to be expected that creatureship would insure blessings. The instant that a race of beings declined from loyalty to God, there was nothing to be looked for but the suspension of all the outgoings of the Creator's beneficence; seeing that the law, entailed by creatureship, having been violated, the privileges to which it admitted were of necessity forfeited.

And this was the position in which the human race stood, when, by the first transgression, God's service was renounced. Whatever the fairness with which Adam might have calculated, that, if he con-

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tinued obedient, his every want would be supplied, he could not reckon, when he had broken the command, on a breath of air, or a ray of sunshine, or a particle of food. It was no longer, if we may use the expression, natural, that he should be upheld in being and sufficiency. On the contrary, the probability must have been that he would be immediately annihilated, or left to consume away piecemeal. And since, in spite of this forfeiture, we are still in the enjoyment of all the means and mercies of existence, we must be bound, even far more than angels who never transgressed, to acknowledge that "all things come of God." Angels receive all things by the charter of creation. But man tore up that charter; and we should therefore receive nothing, had there not been given us a new charter, even the charter of redemption. So that God hath made a fresh and special arrangement on behalf of the fallen. And now, whatsoever we possess, whether it have to do with our intellectual part, or our animal, with the present life or the future, is delivered into our hands stamped, so to speak, with the sign of the cross; and we learn that "all things come of God," because all things, even the most common and insignificant, flow through the channel of a superhuman mediation, and are sprinkled with the blood to which Divinity gave preciousness.

But we may consider that we have sufficiently examined the fact asserted in our text, and may pass on, secondly, to the inference which it furnishes.

This inference is—and you can require no argument to prove to you its justice—that we can give God nothing which is not already his. “All things come of thee, and of *thine own* have we given thee.” You must perceive at once, that, if it be true of the creatures of every rank of intelligence, that they possess nothing which they have not received from God, they can offer nothing which is purely and strictly their own. But it is necessary that we examine, with something of attention, into the nature of God’s gifts, in order to remove an objection which might be brought against our statements. If one creature give a thing to another, he ceases to have property in the gift, and cannot again claim it as his own. If a man make me a present, he virtually cedes all title to the thing given; and if I were afterwards to restore him the whole, or a part, it would be of mine own, and not of his own, that I gave him. But if—for even amongst ourselves we may find a case somewhat analogous to that of the Creator in his dealings with creatures—if I were reduced to utter poverty, with no means whatsoever of earning a livelihood; and if a generous individual came forward, and gave me capital, and set me up in trade; and if, in mine after prosperity, I should bring my benefactor some offering expressive of my gratitude; it is clear that I might, with the strictest truth, say “Of *thine own* do I give thee.” I should be indebted to my benefactor for what I was able to give; and, of course, that for which I

stood indebted to him might be declared to be his. But even this case comes far short of that of the Creator and the creature. The creature belongs to God : and God, therefore, cannot give to the creature in that sense in which one creature may give to another. All that the creature is, and all that the creature has, appertains to God ; so that, in giving, God alienates not his property in that which he bestows. If he own, so to speak, the angel, or the man, then whatever the angel or the man possesses, belongs still to his proprietor ; and though that proprietor may give things to be used, they must continue *his own*, in themselves, and in their produce. If indeed it were possible that a creature could become the property of any other than the Creator, it might be also possible that a creature could possess what was not the Creator's. But as long as it is certain that no creature can have right to call himself his own—the fact of creation making him God's by an invulnerable title—it ought to be received as a self-evident truth, that no creature can possess a good thing which is his own. All which he receives from the bounty of God still belongs to God. So that if whatsoever is brilliant and holy in the universe combined to fashion an offering ; if the depths of the mines were fathomed for the richest of metals, and the starry pavilions swept of their jewelry, and the ranks of the loftiest intelligence laid under contribution ; there could be poured no *gift* into the coffers of heaven ; but the splendid oblation, thus brought



to the Almighty, would be his before, as much as after presentation.

And this truth it is by which we look to demonstrate the impossibility of creature-merit. We will begin with the highest order of created intelligence, and we will ask you whether the angel or the archangel can merit of God? If one being merit of another, it must perform some action which it was not obliged to perform, and by which that other is advantaged. Nothing else, as you must perceive if you will be at the pains of thinking, can constitute merit. I do another a favour, and, therefore, deserve at his hands, if I do something by which he is profited, and which I was not obliged, by mere duty, to do. If either of these conditions fail, merit must vanish. If the other party gain nothing, he can owe me nothing; and if I have only done what duty prescribed, he had a right to the action, and cannot, therefore, have been laid under obligation.

Now if this be a just description of merit, can the angel or the archangel deserve any thing of God? We waive the consideration, that, if there be merit, God must be advantaged—though there lies in it the material of an overpowering proof that the notion of creature-merit is little short of blasphemous. Who can think of being profitable unto God, when he remembers the independence of Deity, and calls to mind that there was a time when the Creator had not surrounded himself with worlds and tribes, and when, occupied by glorious and ineffable commu-

nings, the Father, Son, and Spirit, reaped in from the deep solitudes of immensity as full a revenue of happiness as they now gather from its thickly-peopled circles? No creature can do without God. But God could have done without creatures. They were not necessary to God. There was no void in his blessedness which required the contributions of creatures before it could be filled up. And it must be absurd to talk of advantaging God, when we know that his magnificence and his happiness would have been infinite, had he chosen to dwell for ever in his sublime loneliness, and suffered not the stillness of the unmeasured expanse, full only of himself, to be broken by the hum of a swarming population.

But we waive this consideration. We fasten you to the fact, that a meritorious action must be an action of which duty demands not the performance. If the angel have spare time which belongs not to God; if the angel have material which belongs not to God; let the angel bestow that time upon that material, and let him bring the result as an oblation to his Maker; and there shall be merit in that oblation; and he shall gain a recompense on the plea of desert; according to the rule which the apostle hath laid down, "Who hath first given to the Lord, and it shall be recompensed unto him again<sup>1</sup>?" If the angel have powers which he is under no obligation of consecrating to God; if they are mightier than

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 35.

suffice for duty; and if there be, therefore, an over-plus which he is at liberty to bestow on some work of supererogation; let him employ these uncalled-for energies in extra and unprescribed service, and, doubtless, his claim shall not be unheeded when he gives in the additional and voluntary performance. But if the angel have time which belongs not to God; and if the angel have power which he is not required to dedicate to God; there is an end of the proved truth, "*Of thine own* have we given thee." In determining the question, whether a creature can merit, we have nothing to do, abstractedly, with the magnificence of the energies of that creature, nor with the stupendousness of the achievements which he is capable of effecting. There is not of necessity any greater reason why an angel should merit, because able to move a world, than why a worm should merit, just because able to crawl upon its surface. The whole question of the possibility of merit is a question of the possibility of outrunning duty. Unless duty be exceeded, every creature must receive, as applicable to himself, the words of the Saviour, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants," (and, if unprofitable, certainly not meritorious;) "we have done that which was our duty to do<sup>1</sup>."

And if duty thus exclude merit, the condition of

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xvii. 10.

the angel, as much as that of the worm, excludes merit. If all which the angel has belong to the Creator; if that noble intelligence which elevates him far above our own level be the property of God; if that awful might, which could strew the ground with the thousands of the Assyrian host, be communicated by Deity: if that velocity of flight, which fits him to go on embassages to the very outskirts of creation, be imparted by his Maker—there must be a demand, an inalienable demand, upon the angel, for every instant of his time, and for every fraction of his strength, and for every waving of his wing. Duty, the duty which is imposed upon him by the fact of his creatureship, can draw no frontier-line excluding from a required consecration to God the minutest item of those multiform possessions, which render him a splendid and masterful thing, the nearest approach to Divinity in all that interminable series of productions which bounded into being at the call of the Omnipotent.

So that the angel, just as much as the meanest of creatures, must say of all that he can bring to God, *Of thine own* do I give thee. It is, indeed, a costlier offering than the human eye hath seen, or the human thought imagined. There is a fervour of affection, and a grasp of understanding, and a strenuousness of labour, ay, and an intenseness of self-abasement and humility, which enter not into the best and purest of the oblations which are laid by ourselves at the feet of our Maker. But as there is not one jot less than duty prescribes, neither is there

one jot more. God gave all which is brought to Him. His the glowing love. His the soaring intellect. His the awful vigour. His the beautiful lowliness. And shall he be laid under obligation by his own? Shall he be bound to make return, because he hath received of his own? Oh, we may discuss, and debate upon earth, the possibility, or the impossibility, of creature-merit. But we may be sure, that if the question could be propounded to angels, the thought of merit would be rejected as treason. Standing in the immediate presence of their glorious Creator; privileged to gaze, so far as it is possible for creatures to gaze, without being withered, on his unveiled lustres; and fraught with the consciousness, that, however wonderful their powers and capacities, they possess nothing which God did not give, and which God might not instantly withdraw—angels must feel that the attempt to deserve of the Almighty would be tantamount to an attempt to dethrone the Almighty, and that the supposing that more might be done than is demanded by duty, would be the supposing an Eternity exhausted, and time left for some praiseworthy exploits. Angels must discern, with an acuteness of perception never reached by ourselves whilst hampered by corruption, that each energy in their endowment constitutes a requisition for a contribution of glory to Jehovah; and that the endeavour to employ it to the procuring greatness, or happiness, for themselves, would amount to a base and fatal prostitution, causing them at once to be ranked with the apostate. And thus upon the

simple principle that “all things come of God,” and that only of *his own* can they give Him, angels, who are vast in might, and brilliant in purity, would count it the breaking into rebellion to entertain the thought of the possibility of merit; and unless you could prove to them that God had given less than all, that there were abilities in their nature which they had derived from sources independent on Deity, and that, consequently, their duty towards God required not the dedication of every iota of every faculty; unless you could prove to them this—and you might prove this, when you could show them two Gods, two Creators, and parcel out between two Almightyies the authorship of their surpassing endowments—you would make no way with your demonstration, that it was possible for an angel to deserve of God. You might accumulate your arguments. But as long as they reached not the point thus marked out, still, as the shining and potent beings came in from the execution of lofty commissions, and poured into the treasury of their Maker the noble contributions of his accomplished purposes, oh, they would veil their faces, and bow down in lowliness, and confess themselves unprofitable; and, in place of grounding a claim on the employment of their energies in the service of Jehovah, reverently declare that the non-employment would have deserved the fire and the rack; so that, throwing from them as impious the notion of merit, they would roll this chorus through the heavenly Temple, “All

things come of thee, and of *thine own*, O God, have we given thee."

Now if we bring down our inquiry from the higher orders of intelligence to the lower, we of course carry with us the proof which has been advanced of the impossibility of merit. If we pass from the case of angels to that of men, we may fairly apply the results of our foregoing argument, and consider the one case as involved in the other. It will hardly be disputed, that, if creatureship exclude the possibility of merit from amongst angels, it must also exclude it from amongst men. We argue not, indeed, that merit is more out of the reach of one rank of beings than of another. We simply contend that with every rank of being merit is an impossibility; but, since a thing cannot be more than impossible, we, of course, do not speak of degrees of impossibility. And yet, undoubtedly, there is a sense in which an angel comes nearer merit than a man. An angel falls not short of duty, though it cannot exceed; and therefore it deserves nothing, neither wrath, nor reward. A man, on the contrary, falls short of duty, and, therefore, deserves wrath; though, even if he fell not short, he could not exceed, and therefore, could not deserve reward. So that the angel goes further than the man. The angel fulfils duty, but cannot overstep. The man leaves a vast deal undone which he is required to do; and he must, at least, make up deficiencies before he can think of an overplus. We may consider, then, that

in proving the impossibility of creature-merit, when the creature is angelic, we have equally proved it when the creature is human. And thus heaven would have been as much a free-gift to Adam, had he never disobeyed by eating of the fruit, as it now is to the vilest of his descendants, with the treason-banner in his hand, and the leprosy-spot on his forehead. Had Adam walked unflinchingly through his probation-time, spurning back the tempter, and swerving not an iota from loyalty and love; and had he then appeared before his Maker, exclaiming, Now, O God, I have *deserved* immortality—why, this very speech would have been the death-knell of our creation; and Adam would as actually have fallen, and as actually have sent down the dark bequeathments of a curse to his latest posterity, by pretending to have merited because he had obeyed, as now that he led the van in rebellion, and, breaking a positive law, dislocated the happiness of a countless population.

We thus consider that the impossibility of human merit follows, as a corollary, on our demonstration of the impossibility of angelic. But we shall not content ourselves with inferring the one case from the other. Feeling deeply the importance of your understanding thoroughly why you cannot merit of God, we shall apply briefly our text to the commonly presumed instances of human desert.

You will find one man thinking, that, if he repent, he shall be pardoned. In other words, he supposes



that there is a virtue in repentance which causes it to procure forgiveness. Thus repentance is exhibited as meritorious; and how shall we simply prove that it is not meritorious? Why, allowing that man can repent of himself—which he cannot—what is the repentance on which he presumes? What is there in it of his own? The tears? they are but the dew of an eye which is God's. The sighs? they are but the heavings of a heart which is God's. The resolutions? they are but the workings of faculties which are God's. The amendment? it is but the better employment of a life which is God's. Where then is the merit? Oh, find something which is, at the same time, human and excellent in the offering, and you may speak of desert. But until then, away with the notion of there being merit in repentance, seeing that the penitent man must say, "All things come of thee, and of *thine own*, O God, do I give thee."

Again: some men will speak of being justified by faith, till they come to ascribe merit to faith. "By faith," is interpreted as though it meant, on account of faith; and thus the great truth is lost sight of, that we are justified freely "through the redemption that is in Christ <sup>1</sup>." But how can faith be a meritorious act? What is faith but such an assent of the understanding to God's word as binds the heart to God's service? And whose is the understanding, if it be not God's? Whose is the heart, if it be not God's? And if faith be nothing but the rendering

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 24.

to God that intellect, and that energy, which we have received from God, how can faith deserve of God? Oh, as with repentance, so with faith; away with the notion of merit. He who believes, so that he can dare the grave, and grasp eternity, must pour forth the confession, "All things come of thee, and of *thine own*, O God, do I give thee."

And once more: what merit can there be in works? If you give much alms, whose is the money? "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts<sup>1</sup>." If you mortify the body, whose are the macerated limbs? If you put sackcloth on the soul, whose is the chastened spirit? If you be moral, and honest, and friendly, and generous, and patriotic, whose are the dispositions which you exercise, whose the powers to which you give culture and scope? And if you only use God's gifts, can that be meritorious? You may say, yes—it is meritorious to use them aright, whilst others abuse them. But is it wickedness to abuse? Then it can only be duty to use aright; and duty will be merit, when debt is donation. You may bestow a fortune in charity; but the wealth is already the Lord's. You may cultivate the virtues which adorn and sweeten human life; but the employed powers are the Lord's. You may give time and strength to the enterprises of philanthropy; each moment is the Lord's, each sinew is the Lord's. You may be upright in every

<sup>1</sup> Haggai ii. 8.

dealing of trade, scrupulously honourable in all the intercourses of life; but “a just weight and balance are the Lord’s, all the weights of the bag are his work<sup>1</sup>.” And where then is the merit of works? Oh, throw into one heap each power of the mind, each energy of the body; use in God’s service each grain of your substance, each second of your time; give to the Almighty every throb of the pulse, every drawing of the breath; labour and strive, and be instant, in season and out of season, and let the steepness of the mountain daunt you not, and the swellings of the ocean deter you not, and the ruggedness of the desert appal you not, but on, still on, in toiling for your Maker; and dream, and talk, and boast of merit, when you can find the particle in the heap, or the shred in the exploit, which you may exclude from the confession, “All things come of thee, and of *thine own*, O God, have I given thee.”

Now we would trust that the impossibility of creature-merit has thus been established as an inference from the statement of our text. We wish you thoroughly to perceive that merit is inconsistent with creatureship. We do not merely prove that this, or that, order of being cannot merit. Merit is inconsistent with creatureship. A creature meriting of the Creator is an impossibility. When the archangel can merit, the worm may merit. And he alone who is independent; he who has received nothing;

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xvi. 11.

he who is every thing to himself, as well as every thing to the universe, his own fountain of existence, his own storehouse of happiness, his own harvest of glory; God alone can merit, and therefore, God alone could redeem.

We have now only, in conclusion, to ask whether you will keep back from God what is strictly his own? Will ye rob God, and pawn his time, and his talents, and his strength with the world? Will ye refuse him what, though it cannot be given with merit, cannot be denied without ruin? He asks your heart; give it him; it is his own. He asks your intellect; give it him; it is his own. He asks your money; give it him; it is his own. Remember the words of the Apostle, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price<sup>1</sup>." Ye are not your own. Ye are bought, even if ye perish. Your bodies are not your own, though you may enslave them to lust; they are God's, to be thrown to the rack. Your souls are not your own, though you may hide, and tarnish, and degrade their immortality; they are God's, to be chained down to the rock, that the waves of wrath may dash and break over them. Oh, we want you; nay, the spirits of the just want you; and the holy angels want you; and the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost want you; all but the devil and ruined souls want you, to leave off defrauding the Almighty, and to give him *his own*, your-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20.

selves, his by creation, his doubly by redemption. I must give God the body, I must give God the soul. I give Him the body, if I clothe the tongue with his praises; if I yield not my members as instruments of unrighteousness; if I suffer not the fires of unhallowed passion to light up mine eye, nor the vampire of envy to suck the colour from my cheek; if I profane not my hands with the gains of ungodliness; if I turn away mine ear from the scoffer, and keep under every appetite, and wrestle with every lust: making it palpable that I consider each limb as not destined to corruption, but intended for illustrious service, when, at the trumpet-blast of the resurrection, the earth's sepulchres shall be riven. And I give God the soul, when the understanding is reverently turned on the investigations of celestial truth; when the will is reduced to a meek compliance with the divine; and when all the affections move so harmoniously with the Lord's that they fasten on the objects which occupy his. This it is to give God his own. O God! "*all* things come of thee." The will to present ourselves must come of thee. Grant that will unto all of us, that we may consecrate unreservedly every thing to thy service, and yet humbly confess that of *thine own* alone do we give thee.

## SERMON IV.

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### THE HUMILIATION OF THE MAN CHRIST JESUS<sup>1</sup>.

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PHILIPPIANS ii. 8.

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

WE have been spared to reach once more that solemn season at which our Church directs specially our attention to the sufferings and death of the Redeemer. There can never, indeed, be the time at which the contemplation of the offering-up of our great high priest is at all out of place. Knowing the foundation of every hope, our thoughts should be continually on that substitution of the innocent for the guilty which was made upon Calvary, when he “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth<sup>2</sup>,” “bare our sins in his own body on the tree<sup>3</sup>.” It is still, however, most true, that the preaching Christ Jesus, and him crucified, requires

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Bishop Sherlock for much assistance in handling this and the following subject.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 24.

not, as it consists not in, the perpetual recurrence to the slaying of our surety. The preaching of the cross is not, necessarily, that preaching which makes most frequent mention of the cross. That is the preaching of the cross, and that is the preaching of Christ, which makes the crucifixion of the Son of God its groundwork; which offers no mercy, and exhorts to no duty, but on the distinct understanding that no mercy could be obtained, had not a Mediator purchased it, no duty performed, had He not gained for us the power. But when the groundwork has been thoroughly laid, then, though it behoves us occasionally to refer to first principles, and to examine over again the strength of our basis, it is certainly not our business to insist continually on the presentation of sacrifice: just as if, this one article received, the whole were mastered of the creed of a Christian.

For nothing do we more admire the services of our Church, than for the carefulness displayed that there be no losing sight of the leading doctrines of the faith. It may be said of the Clergy of the Church of England, that they are almost compelled by the Almanack, if not by a sense of the high duties of their calling, to bring successively before their congregations the prominent articles of Christianity. It is not left to their own option, as it comparatively would be if they were not fastened to a ritual, to pass a year without speaking of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, of the Trinity

of persons in the Godhead, or of the outpouring of the Spirit. If they be disposed to keep any of these matters out of their discourses, the Collects bring the omitted doctrines before the people, and convict the pastors of unfaithfulness. A dissenting congregation may go on for years, and never once be directed to the grand doctrine of the Trinity in Unity. They are dependent on their minister. He may advance what he chooses, and keep back what he chooses; for he selects his own lessons, as well as his own texts. An established congregation is not thus dependent on its minister. He may be an Unitarian in his heart; but he must be so far a Trinitarian to his people as to declare from the desk, even if he keep silence in the pulpit, that "the Catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity<sup>1</sup>." And thus, whatever the objections which may be urged against forms of prayer, we cannot but think that a country without a liturgy is a country which lies open to all the incursions of heresy.

We obey, then, with thankfulness, the appointment of our Church which turns our thoughts specially at particular times on particular doctrines; not at any season excluding their discussion, but providing that, at least once in the year, each should occupy a prominent place.

We would lead you, therefore, now to the survey

<sup>1</sup> Athanasian Creed.



of the humiliation of the man Christ Jesus, and thus take a step in that pilgrimage to Gethsemane and Calvary which, at the present time, is enjoined on the faithful.

We bring before you a verse from the well-known passage of Scripture which forms the epistle of the day, and which furnishes some of our strongest arguments against those who deny the divinity of Christ. It cannot well be disputed, whatever the devised subterfuges for avoiding the inferences, that St. Paul speaks of the Mediator in three different states ; a state of glory, when he was “in the form of God ;” a state of humiliation, when he assumed “the form of a servant ;” a state of exaltation, when there was “given him a name which is above every name.” It is further evident, that the state of glory preceded the state of humiliation ; so that Christ must have pre-existed in the form of God, and not have begun to exist when appearing on earth in the form of a servant. Indeed the apostle is inculcating humility, and enforcing his exhortation by the example of the Saviour. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” You can require no proof that the strength of this exhortation lies in the fact, that Christ displayed a vast humility in consenting to become man ; and that it were to take from it all power, and all meaning, to suppose him nothing more than a man. It is surely no act of humility to be a man ; and no individual can set an example of humility by the mere being a man. But if one who

pre-exists in another rank of intelligence become a man, then, but not otherwise, there may be humility, and consequently example, in his manhood.

We can, however, only suggest these points to your consideration, desiring that you may be led to give to the whole passage that attention which it singularly deserves. We must confine ourselves to the single verse which we have selected as our text, and which, in itself, is so full of information that there may be difficulty in giving to each part the requisite notice.

The verse refers to the Redeemer in his humiliation, but cannot, as we shall find, be fairly interpreted without taking for granted his pre-existent glory. St. Paul, you observe, speaks of Christ as “found in fashion as a man,” and as then *humbling* himself, so as to become “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It will be well that we advance a few remarks on the phrase “found in fashion as a man,” before we consider that act of humility here ascribed to the Saviour.

Now the true humanity of the Son of God is as fundamental an article of Christianity as his true divinity. You would as effectually demolish our religion by proving that Christ was not real man, as by proving that Christ was not real God. We must have a mediator between God and man; and “a mediator is not a mediator of one<sup>1</sup>,” but must par-

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 20.

take of the nature of each. Shall we ever hesitate to pronounce it the comforting and sustaining thing to the followers of Christ, that the Redeemer is, in the strictest sense, their kinsman? We may often be required, in the exercise of the office of an ambassador from God, to set ourselves against what we count erroneous doctrines touching the humanity of the Saviour. But shall it, on this account, be supposed, that we either underrate, or keep out of sight, this mighty truth of Christianity, that the Son of God became as truly, and as literally, man, as I myself am man? We cannot, and we will not, allow that there was in him that fountain of evil which there is in ourselves. We contend that the absence of the fountain, and not the mere prevention of the outbreak of its waters, is indispensable to the constitution of such purity as belonged to the holy child Jesus. But that he was like myself in all points, my sinfulness only excepted; that his flesh, like mine, could be lacerated by stripes, wasted by hunger, and torn by nails; that his soul, like mine, could be assaulted by temptation, harassed by Satan, and disquieted under the hidings of the countenance of the Father; that he could suffer every thing which I can suffer, except the remorse of a guilty conscience; that he could weep every tear which I can weep, except the tear of repentance; that he could fear with every fear, hope with every hope, and joy with every joy, which I may entertain as a man, and not be ashamed of as a Christian; there is our creed on

the humanity of the Mediator. If you could once prove that Christ was not perfect man—bearing always in mind that sinfulness is not essential to this perfectness—there would be nothing worth battling for in the truth that Christ was perfect God: the only Redeemer who can redeem, like the Goel under the law, my lost heritage, being necessarily my kinsman; and none being my kinsman who is not of the same nature, born of a woman, of the substance of that woman, my brother in all but rebellion, myself in all but unholiness.

We are bound, therefore, to examine, with all care, expressions which refer to the humanity of the Saviour, and especially those which may carry the appearance of impugning its reality. Now it is remarkable, and could not be without design, that St. Paul uses words which go not directly to the fact of the reality of the humanity, but which might almost be thought to evade that fact. He does not broadly and roundly assert, that Christ was man. He takes what, at least, may be called a circuitous method, and uses three expressions, all similar, but none direct. “Took upon him the form of a servant.” “Was made in the likeness of men.” “Being found in fashion as a man.” There must, we say, have been some weighty reason with the apostle why he should, as it were, have avoided the distinct mention of Christ’s manhood, and have employed language which, to a certain extent, is ambiguous. Why speak of the “form of a servant,” of the “likeness

of men," and of "being found in fashion as a man," when he wished to convey the idea that Christ was actually a servant, and literally a man?

We will, first of all, show you that these expressions, however apparently vague and indefinite, could never have been intended to bring into question the reality of Christ's humanity. The apostle employs precisely the same kind of language in reference to Christ's divinity. He had before said of the Saviour, "who being in the *form of God*." If, then, "the likeness of men," or "the form of a servant," implied that Christ was not really man, or not really a servant, "the form of God" would imply that he was not really God. The several expressions must have a similar interpretation. And if, therefore, Christ was not really man, Christ was not really God; and what then was he? Neither man, nor God, is a conclusion for which no heretic is prepared. All admit that he was God separately, or man separately, or God and man conjointly. And therefore the expressions, "form of God," "form of a servant," must mean literally God, and literally a servant; otherwise Christ was neither divine nor human, but a phantom of both, and therefore a nothing. So that, whatever St. Paul's reasons for employing this kind of expression, you see at once that, since he uses it alike, whether in reference to the connexion of Christ with divinity, or to that with humanity, it can take off nothing from the reality of either the manhood, or the Godhead. If it took from one, it must

take equally from both. And thus Christ would be left without any subsistence—a conclusion too monstrous for that most credulous of all things, scepticism.

We are certain therefore—inasmuch as the alternative is an absurdity which waits not refutation—that when St. Paul asserts of Christ that he was “found in fashion as a man,” he intends nothing at variance with the doctrine of the real humanity of the Saviour. He points him out as actually man; though, for reasons which remain to be investigated, he adopts the phrase, “the fashion of a man.”

Now it cannot, we think, be doubted that an opposition is designed between the expressions “in the form of God,” and “found in fashion as a man,” and that we shall understand the intent of the latter, only through possessing ourselves of that of the former. If you consult your Bibles, you will perceive the representation of St. Paul to be, that it was “the form of God” of which Christ emptied himself, or which Christ laid aside, when condescending to be born of a woman. “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, (so we render it, but literally it is, ‘emptied himself,’) and took upon him the form of a servant.” It was, therefore, “the *form* of God” which Christ laid aside. He was still God, and could not for a lonely instant cease to be God. But he did not appear as God. He put from him, or he veiled, those efful-

gent demonstrations of Deity, which had commanded the homage, and called forth the admiration, of the celestial hierarchy. And though he was all the while God, God as truly, and as actually, as when, in the might of manifested Omnipotence, he filled infinite space with glorious masses of architecture, still he so restrained the blazings of Divinity that he could not, in the same sense, be known as God, but wanted the form whilst retaining the essence. He divested himself, then, of the form of God, and assumed, in its stead, the form or fashion of a man. Heretofore, he had both been, and appeared to be God. Now he was God, but appeared as a man. The very being who had dazzled the heavenly hosts in the form of God, walked the earth in the form and fashion of a man. Such, we think, is a fair account of the particular phraseology which St. Paul employs. The apostle is speaking of Christ as more than man. Had Christ been only man, how preposterous to say of him, that he was "found in fashion as a man!" What other fashion, what other outward appearance, can a mere man present, but the fashion, the outward appearance of a man? But if Christ were God, and yet appeared as man, there is perfect accuracy in the statement that he was "found in fashion as a man;" and we can understand, readily enough, how he who never ceased, and could not cease to be God, might, at one time, manifest divinity in the form of God, and, at another, shroud that divinity in the form of a servant.

We would pause yet a moment on this point, for it is worth your closest attention. We are told that Christ “emptied himself,” so that, “though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor<sup>1</sup>.” But of what did he empty himself? Not of his being, not of his nature, not of his attributes. It must be blasphemous to speak of properties of Godhead as laid aside, or even suspended. But Christ “emptied himself” of the glories, and the majesties, to which he had claim, and which, as he sat on the throne of the heavens, he possessed in unmeasured abundance. Whatsoever he was, as to nature and essence, whilst appearing amongst the angels in the form of God, that he continued to be still, when, in the form of a servant, he walked the scenes of human habitation. But then the *glories* of the form of God, these for awhile he altogether abandoned. If indeed he had appeared upon earth—as, according to the dignity of his nature, he had right to appear—in the majesty and glory of the Highest, it might be hard to understand what riches had been lost by divinity. The scene of display would have been changed. But the splendour of display being unshorn and undiminished, the armies of the sky might have congregated round the Mediator, and have given in their full tale of homage and admiration. But, oh, it was poverty that the Creator should be moving on a province of his own empire, and yet not be recognised, nor con-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 9.



fessed, by his creatures. It was poverty, that, when he walked amongst men, scattering blessings as he trode, the anthem of praise floated not around him, and the air was often burdened with the curse and the blasphemy. It was poverty, that, as he passed to and fro through tribes whom he had made, and whom he had come down to redeem, scarce a solitary voice called him blessed, scarce a solitary hand was stretched out in friendship, and scarce a solitary roof ever proffered him shelter. And when you contrast this deep and desolate poverty with that exuberant wealth which had been always his own, whilst heaven continued the scene of his manifestations—the wealth of the anthem-peal of ecstasy from a million rich voices, and of the solemn bowing-down of sparkling multitudes, and of the glowing homage of immortal hierarchies, whensoever he showed forth his power or his purposes—ye cannot fail to perceive, that, in taking upon him flesh, the Eternal Son descended, most literally, from abundance to want; and that, though he continued just as mighty as before, just as infinitely gifted with all the stores and resources of essential Divinity, the transition was so total, from the reaping-in of glory from the whole field of the universe to the receiving, comparatively, nothing of his revenues of honour, that we may assert, without reserve, and without figure, that he who was rich, for our sakes became poor. “In the form of God,” he had acted, as it were, visibly, amid the enraptured plaudits of angel and archangel, cherubim and se-

raphim. But now, in the form of man, he must be withdrawn from the delighted inspections of the occupants of heaven, and act, as powerfully indeed as before, but mysteriously and invisibly, behind a dark curtain of flesh, and on the dreary platform of a sin-burdened territory. So that the antithesis, "the form of God," and "found in fashion as a man," marks accurately the change to which the Mediator submitted. And thus, whilst on our former showings, there is no impeachment, in the phrase, of the reality of Christ's humanity, we now extract from the description a clear witness to the divinity of Jesus; and show you that a form of speech which seems, at first sight, vague and indefinite, was, if not rendered unavoidable, yet readily dictated, by the union of natures in the person of the Redeemer.

But we will now pass on to consider that act of humility which is ascribed in our text to Christ Jesus. "Being found in fashion as a man, he *humbled* himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Now we would have it observed—for some of the greatest truths in theology depend on the fact—that the apostle is here speaking of what Christ did after he had assumed humanity, and not of what he did in assuming humanity. There was an act of humiliation, such as mortal thought cannot compass, in the coming down of Deity, and his tabernacling in flesh. We may well exclaim, Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, when we remember that

He whom the universe cannot contain did, literally, condescend to circumscribe himself within the form of a servant; and that, in no figure of speech, but in absolute, though mysterious, reality, "the Word was made flesh<sup>1</sup>," and the Son of the Highest born of a pure virgin. We shall never find terms in which to embody even our own conceptions of this unmeasured humiliation; whilst these conceptions themselves leave altogether unapproached the boundary-lines of the wonder. Who can "by searching find out God<sup>2</sup>?" Who, then, by striving can calculate the abasement that God should become man? If I could climb to Deity, I might know what it was for Deity to descend into dust. But forasmuch as God is inaccessible to all my soarings, it can never come within the compass of my imagination to tell up the amount of condescension; and it will always remain a prodigy, too large for every thing but faith, that the Creator coalesced with the creature, and so constituted a mediator.

But it is not to this act of humiliation that our text bears reference. This was the humiliation in the assumption of humanity. But after humanity had been assumed, when Christ was "found in fashion as a man," he yet further humbled himself; so that, over and above the humiliation as God, there was an humiliation as man. And it is on this fact that we would fasten your attention. You are to view the

<sup>1</sup> St. John i. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Job xi. 7.

Son of God as having brought himself down to the level of humanity, as having laid aside his dignities, and taken part of the flesh and the blood of those whom he yearned to redeem. But then you are not to consider that the humiliation ended here. You are not to suppose that whatsoever came after was bound-up, so to speak, in the original humiliation, and thus was nothing more than its fuller development. God humbled himself, and became man. But there was yet a lower depth to which this first humiliation did not necessarily carry him. "Being found in fashion as a *man*, he *humbled* himself."

The apostle does not leave us to conjecture in what this second humiliation mainly consisted. He represents it as submission to death, "even the death of the cross." So that, after becoming man, it was "humbling himself," to yield to that sentence from which no man is exempted. It was "humbling himself," to die at all; it was "humbling himself" still more, to die ignominiously.

We will examine successively these statements, and the conclusions to which they naturally lead.

It was humility in Christ to die at all. Who then was this mysterious man of whom it can be said that he humbled himself in dying? Who can that man be in whom that was humility, which, in all others, is necessity? Has there ever been the individual amongst the natural descendants of Adam, however rare his endowments or splendid his achievements, however illustrious by the might of heroism, or

endeared by the warmth of philanthropy, of whom we could say that it was humility in him to die? It were as just to say that it was humility in him to have had only five senses, as that it was humility in him to die. The most exalted piety, the nearest approaches to perfection of character, the widest distances between himself and all others of the race; these, and a hundred the like reasons, would never induce us to give harbourage, for an instant, to the thought, that a man stood exempt from the lot of humanity, or that it was left, in any sense, to his option whether or no he would die. And, therefore, if there be a strong method of marking-off a man from the crowd of the human species, and of distinguishing him, from all who bear the same outward appearance, in some mightier respects than those of a mental, or moral superiority, is it not the ascribing to him what we may call a lordship over life, or the representing him as so literally at liberty to live, that it shall be humility in him to die? We hold it for an incontrovertible truth, that, had St. Paul said nothing of the pre-existent glory of our Mediator, there would have been enough in the expression of our text to satisfy unprejudiced minds, that a mere man, such as one of ourselves, could be no just description of the Lord Christ Jesus. If it were humility in the man to die, there must have been a power in the man of refusing to die. If, in becoming "obedient unto death," the man "humbled himself," there can be no debate that his dying was a

voluntary act ; and that, had he chosen to decline submission to the rending asunder of soul and body, he might have continued to this day unworn by disease, unbroken by age, the immortal man, the indestructible flesh. We can gather nothing from such form of expression, but that it would have been quite possible for the Mediator to have upheld, through long cycles, undecayed his humanity, and to have preserved it staunch and unbroken, whilst generation after generation rose, and flourished, and fell. He in whom it was humility to die, must have been one who could have resisted, through a succession of ages, the approaches of death, and thus have still trodden our earth, the child of centuries past, the heir of centuries to come.

We plead for it as a most simple and necessary deduction, and we deny altogether that it is a harsh and overstrained inference, from the fact that the man Christ Jesus humbled himself in dying, that the man was more than man, and that a nature, higher than human, yea, even divine, belonged to his person. We can advance no other account of such an act of humility. If you were even to say that the second Adam was in every respect just such a man as the first, ere evil entered, and, with it, obnoxiousness to death, you would introduce greater difficulties than the one to be removed. You may say that if, for the sake of winning some advantage to his posterity, Adam, whilst yet unfallen, and therefore, without

“the sentence of death<sup>1</sup>” in his members, had consented to die, he would, strictly speaking, have *humbled* himself in dying; and that consequently Christ, supposing him sinless like Adam, and therefore under no necessity of death, might have displayed humility in consenting to die, and yet not thereby have proved himself divine as well as human. We are not disposed to controvert the statement. So far as we can judge—though we have some jealousy of allowing that a mere creature can *humble* himself in executing God’s work—it may be true, that, had the man Christ Jesus been, in every respect, similar to the unfallen Adam, there might have been humility in his dying, and yet no divinity in his person.

But then we strenuously set ourselves against such a false and pernicious view of the Saviour’s humanity. We will admit that a Papist, but we deny that a Protestant, can, without doing utter violence to his creed, maintain that in every respect Christ resembled the unfallen Adam. The Papist entertains extravagant notions of the Virgin-mother of our Lord. He supposes her to have been immaculate, and free from original corruption. The Protestant, on the contrary, withholding not from Mary due honour and esteem, classes her, in every sense, amongst the daughters of man, and believes that, whatever her

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. i. 9.

superior loveliness of character, she had her full share of the pollution of our nature. Now it may consist well enough with the Papist's theory, but it is wholly at variance with the Protestant's, to suppose that the man Jesus, made of the substance of his mother, had a humanity, like that of Adam, free from infirmity, as well as from sinful propensity. And we can never bring up the humanity of Christ into exact sameness with the humanity of Adam, without either overthrowing the fundamental article of faith, that the Redeemer was the seed of the woman, or ascribing to his mother such preternatural purity, as makes her own birth as mysterious as her son's.

We would pause, for a moment, in our argument, and speak on the point of the Saviour's humanity. We are told that Christ's humanity was in every respect the same as our own humanity; fallen therefore, as ours is fallen. But Christ, as not being one of the natural descendants of Adam, was not included in the covenant made with, and violated by, our common forefather. Hence his humanity was the solitary exception, the only humanity which became not fallen humanity as a consequence on Adam's apostasy. If a man be a fallen man, he must have fallen in Adam; in other words, he must be one of those whom Adam federally represented. But Christ, as being emphatically the seed of the woman, was not thus federally represented; and therefore Christ fell not, as we fell, in Adam. He had not been a party to the broken covenant, and thus could not



be a sharer in the guilty consequences of the infraction.

But, nevertheless, while we argue that Christ was not what is termed a fallen man, we contend that since "made of a woman<sup>1</sup>," he was as truly "man, of the substance of his mother<sup>2</sup>," as any one amongst ourselves, the weakest and most sinful. He was "made of a woman," and not a new creation, like Adam in Paradise. When we say that Christ's humanity was unfallen, we are far enough from saying that his humanity was the same as that of Adam, before Adam transgressed. He took humanity with all those innocent infirmities, but without any of those sinful propensities, which the fall entailed. There are consequences on guilt which are perfectly guiltless. Sin introduced pain, but pain itself is not sin. And therefore Christ, as being "man, of the substance of his mother," derived from her a suffering humanity; but as "conceived by the Holy Ghost<sup>3</sup>," he did not derive a sinful. Fallen humanity denotes a humanity which has descended from a state of moral purity to one of moral impurity. And so long as there has not been this descent, humanity may remain unfallen, and yet pass from physical strength to physical weakness. This is exactly what we hold on the humanity of the Son of God. We do not assert that Christ's humanity was the Adamic humanity; the humanity, that is, of Adam whilst

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Athanasian Creed.

<sup>3</sup> Apostles' Creed.

still loyal to Jehovah. Had this humanity been reproduced, there must have been an act of creation; whereas, beyond controversy, Christ was "made of a woman," and not created, like Adam, by an act of omnipotence. And allowing that Christ's humanity was not the Adamic, of course we allow that there were consequences of the fall of which it partook. We divide, therefore, these consequences into innocent infirmities, and sinful propensities. From both was Adam's humanity free before, and with both was it endowed after, transgression. Hence it is enough to have either, and the humanity is broadly distinguished from the Adamic. Now Christ took humanity with the innocent infirmities. He derived humanity from his mother. Bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, like her he could hunger, and thirst, and weep, and mourn, and writhe, and die. But whilst he took humanity with the innocent infirmities, he did not take it with the sinful propensities. Here Deity interposed. The Holy Ghost overshadowed the Virgin, and, allowing weakness to be derived from her, forbade wickedness; and so caused that there should be generated a sorrowing and a suffering humanity, but nevertheless an undefiled and a spotless; a humanity with tears, but not with stains; accessible to anguish, but not prone to offend; allied most closely with the produced misery, but infinitely removed from the producing cause. So that we hold—and we give it you as what we believe the orthodox doctrine—that Christ's humanity was

not the Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it had never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin. "Made of a woman," Christ derived all from his mother that we derive, except sinfulness. And this he derived not, because Deity, in the person of the Holy Ghost, interposed between the child and the pollution of its parent.

But we now recur to the subject-matter of discussion. We may consider our position untouched, that since a man, "made of a woman," *humbled* himself in dying, he must have had another nature which gave him such power over the human, that he might either yield to, or resist, its infirmities. Christ took our nature with its infirmities. And to die is one of these infirmities, just as is to hunger, or to thirst, or to be weary. There is no sin in dying. It is, indeed, a consequence on sin. But consequences may be endured without share in the cause; so that Christ could take flesh which had in it a tendency to death, but no tendency to sin. It is not saying that Christ's flesh was sinful like our own, to say that it was corruptible like our own. There might be eradicated all the tendencies to the doing wrong, and still be left all the physical entailments of the wrong done by another. And no man can read the prophecy, "Thou wilt not leave my

soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption<sup>1</sup>," without perceiving that there was no natural incorruptibility, and, therefore, no natural deathlessness in the flesh of Christ Jesus; for if the flesh had been naturally incorruptible, and, therefore, naturally deathless, how could God be represented as providing that this flesh should not remain so long in the grave as "to see corruption?" The prophecy has no meaning, if it be denied that Christ's body would have corrupted, had it continued in the sepulchre.

We may assert, then, that in Christ's humanity, as in our own, there was a tendency to dissolution; a tendency resulting from entailed infirmities which were innocent, but in no degree from sinfulness, whether derived or contracted. But as the second person in the Trinity, the Lord of life and glory, Christ Jesus possessed an unlimited control over this tendency, and might, had he pleased, for ever have suspended, or for ever have counteracted it. And herein lay the alleged act of humility. Christ was unquestionably mortal; otherwise it is most clear that he could not have died at all. But it is to the full as unquestionable that he must have been more than mortal; otherwise death was unavoidable; and where can be the humility of submitting to that which we have no power of avoiding? As mere man, he was mortal. But then as God, the well-spring of life to the population of the universe, he

<sup>1</sup> Psalm xvi. 10.

could for ever have withstood the advances of death, and have refused it dominion in his own divine person. But "he humbled himself." In order that there might come down upon him the fulness of the wrath-cup, and that he might exhaust the penalties which rolled, like a sea of fire, between earth and heaven, he allowed scope to that liableness to death which he might for ever have arrested; and died, not through any necessity, but through the act of his own will; died, inasmuch as his humanity was mortal; died voluntarily, inasmuch as his person was divine.

And this was humility. If, on becoming man, he had ceased to be God, there would have been no humility in his death. He would only have submitted to what he could not have declined. But since, on becoming what he was not, he ceased not to be what he was, he brought down into the fashion of man all the life-giving energies which appertained to him as God; and he stood on the earth, the wondrous combination of two natures in one person; the one nature infirm and tending to decay, the other self-existent, and the source of all being throughout a crowded immensity.

And the one nature might have eternally kept up the other; and, withstanding the inroads of disease, and pouring fresh supplies of vitality, have given undecaying vigour to the mortal, perpetual youth to the corruptible. But how then could the Scriptures have been fulfilled; and where would

have been the expiation for the sins of a burdened and groaning creation? It was an act of humility—the tongue, we have told you, cannot express it, and the thought cannot compass it—that “for us men and for our salvation,” the Eternal Word consented to be “made flesh.” God became man. It was stupendous humility. But he was not yet low enough. The *man* must humble himself, humble himself even unto death: for “without shedding of blood is no remission<sup>1</sup>.” And he did humble himself. Death was avoidable, but he submitted; the grave might have been overstepped, but he entered.

It would not have been the working out of human redemption, and the millions with whom he had entered into brotherhood would have remained undelivered from their thralldom to Satan, had Deity simply united itself to humanity, and then upheld humanity so as to enable it to defy its great enemy, death. There lay a curse on the earth’s population, and he who would be their surety must do more than take their nature—he must carry it through the darkness and the fearfulness of the realized malediction. But what else was this but a fresh act of humility, a new and unlimited stretch of condescension? Even whilst on earth, and clothed round with human flesh and blood, Christ Jesus was still that great “I am,” who sustains “all things by the word of his power<sup>2</sup>,” and out of whose fulness every rank

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ix. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. i. 3.

of created intelligence hath, from the beginning, drawn the elements of existence. And, therefore, though "found in fashion as a man," he was all along infinitely superior to the necessity of human nature ; and, being able to lay down life and to take it again at pleasure, was only subject to death because determining to die. It was, then, humility to die. It was the voluntary submission to a curse. It was a free-will descent from the high privilege of bearing on humanity through the falling myriads of successive generations, and of strengthening it to walk as the denizen of eternity, whilst there went forward unresisted, on the right hand and on the left, the mowing-down the species. And when, therefore, you would describe the humiliation of the Son of God, think not that you have opened the depths of abasement, when you have shown him exchanging the throne of light, and the glory which he had with the Father, for a tabernacle of flesh, and companionship with the rebel. He went down a second abyss, we had almost said, as fathomless as the first. From heaven to earth, who shall measure it ? But when on earth, when a man, there was the whole precipice of God's curse, not one hair-breadth of which was he necessitated to descend. And when, therefore, he threw himself over this precipice, and sank into the grave, who will deny that there was a new and overwhelming display of condescension ; that there was performed by the God-man, even as there had been by the God, an act of self-humiliation to which we can find no

parallel; and that, consequently, "being found in fashion as a man, Christ *humbled* himself, and became obedient unto *death*?"

But this is not all. You have not yet completed the survey of the Mediator's humiliation.

It was wonderful self-abasement that he should choose to die. But the manner of the death makes the humility a thousand-fold more apparent. "He became obedient unto death, even the *death of the cross*." We wish it observed that Christ Jesus was not insensible to ignominy and disgrace. He submitted; but, oh, he felt acutely and bitterly. You cannot cause a sharper pang to an ingenuous and upright mind than by the imputation of crime. The consciousness of innocence only heightens the smart. It is the guilty man who cares only for the being condemned—the guiltless is pierced through and through by the being accused. And let it never be thought that the humanity of the Son of God, holy and undefiled as it was, possessed not this sensitiveness to disgrace. "Be ye come out as against a *thief*, with swords and staves<sup>1</sup>?" was a remonstrance which clearly showed that he felt keenly the shame of unjust and ruffianly treatment. And, as if it were not humiliation enough to die, shall he, with all this sensitiveness to disgrace, die the death which was, of all others, ignominious; a death appropriated to the basest condition of the worst men, and unworthy of a freeman, whatever the amount of his

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xxii. 52.



guiltiness? Shall the separation of soul from body be effected by an execution to which none were doomed but the most wretched of slaves, or the most abandoned of miscreants; by a punishment, too inhuman indeed to find place in the Jewish code, but the nearest approach to which, the hanging up the dead bodies of criminals, was held so infamous and execrable, that the fearful phrase, "accursed by God," was applied to all thus sentenced and used? We speak of nothing but the shame of the cross; for it was the shame which gave display to humility. And we are bold to say, that, after the condescension of God in becoming man, after the condescension of the God-man in consenting to die, there was an act of condescension, scarce inferior to the others, in that the death was "the death of the cross." He who humbled himself in dying at all, humbled himself unspeakably more in dying as a malefactor. It would have been humility, had he who was exempt from the necessity of our nature consented to fall, as heroes fall, amid the tears of a grateful people, and the applauses of an admiring world. It would have been humility, had he breathed out his soul on the regal couch, and far-spreading tribes had felt themselves orphaned. But to be suspended as a spectacle between heaven and earth; to die a lingering death, exposed to the tauntings and revilings of a profligate multitude—"All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head"<sup>1</sup>—to

<sup>1</sup> Psalm xxii. 7.

be “numbered with the transgressors<sup>1</sup>,” and expire amid the derision and despite of his own kinsmen after the flesh—if the other were humility, how shall we describe this? Yet to this, even to this, did the Mediator condescend. “He endured,” says St. Paul, “the cross, despising the shame<sup>2</sup>.” He felt the shame; otherwise there was nothing memorable in his bringing himself to despise it. He despised it, not as feeling it no evil, but as making it of no account when set against the glorious results which its endurance would effect. For it was not only necessary that he should die; it was also necessary that he should die ignominiously. He must die as *a criminal*; we wish you to observe that. He was to die as man’s substitute; and man was a criminal, yea, the very basest. So that death by public sentence, death as a malefactor, may be said to have been required from a surety who stood in the place of traitors, with all their treason on his shoulders. The shame of the cross was not gratuitous. It was not enough that the substitute humbled himself to death; he must humble himself to a shameful death. And Christ Jesus did this. He could say, in the pathetic words of prophecy, “I hid not my face from shame and spitting<sup>3</sup>.” And shall we doubt, that man as he was, keenly alive to unmerited disgrace, the indignities of his death added loathsomeness to the cup which he had undertaken to drink; and shall

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liii. 12.<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 2.<sup>3</sup> Isaiah l. 6.

we not then confess that there was an humiliation in the mode of dying, over and above that of taking flesh, and that of permitting himself to be mortal—so that the apostle's words are vindicated in their every letter, “Being found in fashion as a man, he *humbled* himself, and became obedient unto *death*, even the death of *the cross* ? ”

We can only, in conclusion, press on you the exhortation of St. Paul: “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” He died to make atonement, but he died also to set a pattern. Shall selfishness find patrons amongst you when you have gazed on this example of disinterestedness? Shall pride be harboured, after you have seen Deity humbling himself, and then, as man, abasing himself, till there was no lower point to which he could descend? And all this for *us* ; for you, for me, for the vile, for the reprobate, for the lost ! And what return do we make? Alas ! for the neglect, the contempt, the coldness, the formality, which he who humbled himself, and agonized, and died the death of shame on our behalf, receives at our hands. Which of us is faithfully taking pattern ? Which of us, I do not say, has mastered and ejected pride, but is setting himself in good earnest, and with all the energy which might be brought to the work, to the wrestling with pride and sweeping it from the breast ? Would to God that this passion-season may leave us more humble, more self-denying, more disposed to bear one another's burdens, than it finds us. Would to God

that it may write, more deeply than ever, on our hearts, the doctrine which is the alone engine against the haughtiness and self-sufficiency of the fallen, that the Mediator between earth and heaven was "perfect God and perfect man<sup>1</sup>." There must be Deity in the rock which could bear up a foundered world. May none of you forget this. The young amongst you more especially, keep ye this diligently in mind. I have lived much amid the choicest assemblies of the literary youth of our land, and I know full well how commonly the pride of talent, or the appetite for novelty, or the desire to be singular, or the aversion from what is holy, will cause an unstable mind to yield itself to the specious sophistry, or the licentious effrontery, of sceptical writings. I pray God that none of you be drawn within the eddies of that whirlpool of infidelity which rends into a thousand shivers the noblest barks, freighted with a rich lading of intellect and learning. Be ye watchful alike against the dogmas of an insolent reasoning, and the siren strains of a voluptuous poetry, and the fiend-like sneers of reprobate men, and the polished cavils of fashionable contempt. Let none of these seduce or scare you from the simplicity of the faith, and breathe blighting on your allegiance, and shrivel you into that withered and sapless thing, the disciple of a creed which owns not divinity in Christ. If I durst choose between falsehoods, I would take Deism rather than

<sup>1</sup> Athanasian Creed.

Socinianism. It seems better to reject as forgery, than, having received as truth, to drain of meaning, to use, without reserve, the sponge and the thumb-screw, the one when passages are too plain for controversy, the other when against us till unmercifully tortured. May you all see, that, unless a Mediator, more than human, had stood in the gap to stay the plague, the penalties of a broken law, unsatisfied through eternity, must have entered like fiery arrows, and scathed and maddened each descendant of Adam. May you all learn to use the doctrine of the atonement as the basis of hope, and the motive to holiness. Thus shall this passion-season be a new starting-point to all of us: to those who have never entered on a heavenward course; to those who have entered, and then loitered; so that none, at last, may occupy the strange and fearful position of men for whom a Saviour died, but died in vain.

## SERMON V.

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THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION VIEWED IN CONNECTION WITH THAT OF THE SOUL'S IMMORTALITY.

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JOHN xi. 25.

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life.”

THERE is perhaps no narrative in the New Testament more deeply interesting than that of the raising of Lazarus. It was nearly the last miracle which Jesus performed whilst sojourning on earth ; and, as though intended for a great seal of his mission, you find the Saviour preparing himself, with extraordinary care, for this exhibition of his power. He had indeed on two other occasions raised the dead. The daughter of Jairus, and the widow's son of Nain, had both, at his bidding, been restored to life. But you will remember that, with regard to the former, Christ had used the expression, “The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth <sup>1</sup>.” and that, probably, the latter had been only a short time deceased when carried out for burial. Hence, in neither case was the evidence that death had taken place, and that the party

<sup>1</sup> Mark v. 39.

was not in a trance, so clear and decisive that no room was left for the cavils of the sceptic. And accordingly, there is ground of doubt whether the apostles themselves were thoroughly convinced of Christ's power over death: whether, that is, they believed him able to recover life when once totally and truly extinguished. At least, you will observe, that, when told that Lazarus was actually dead, they were filled with sorrow; and that, when Christ said that he would go and awaken him from sleep, they resolved indeed to accompany their Master, but expected rather to be themselves stoned by the Jews than to see their friend brought back from the sepulchre.

We may suppose, therefore, that it was with the design of furnishing an irresistible demonstration of his power, that, after hearing of the illness of Lazarus, Jesus tarried two days in the place where the message had found him. He loved Lazarus, and Martha and Mary his sisters. It must then have been the dictate of affection that he should hasten to the distressed family, as soon as informed of their affliction. But had he reached Bethany before Lazarus expired, or soon after the catastrophe had occurred, we may readily see that the same objection might have been urged against the miracle of restoration, as in the other instances in which the grave had been deprived of its prey. There would not have been incontrovertible proof of actual death; and neither, therefore, would there have been incontrovertible proof

that Jesus was "the prince of life<sup>1</sup>." But, by so delaying his journey that he arrived not at Bethany until Lazarus had been four days dead, Christ cut off all occasion of cavil, and, rendering it undeniable that the soul had been separated from the body, rendered it equally undeniable, when he had wrought the miracle, that he possessed the power of re-uniting the two.

As Jesus approached Bethany, he was met by Martha, who seems to have entertained some indistinct apprehension that his prevalence with God, if not his own might, rendered possible, even then, the restoration of her brother. "I know that, even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." This drew from Jesus the saying, "Thy brother shall rise again." The resurrection of the body was, at this time, an article of the national creed, being confessed by the great mass of the Jews, though denied by the Sadducees. Hence Martha had no difficulty in assenting to what Jesus declared; though she plainly implied that she both wished and hoped something more on behalf of her brother. "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." And now it was, that, in order to obtain a precise declaration of faith in his power, Jesus addressed Martha in the words of our text, words of an extraordinary beauty and solemnity, put by the Church into the mouth of the minister,

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 15.



as he meets the sorrowing band who bear a brother, or a sister, to the long home appointed for our race. Jesus said unto her, "I am the resurrection, and the life." Martha had expressed frankly her belief in a general resurrection; but she seemed not to associate this resurrection with Jesus as a cause and an agent. The Redeemer, therefore, gathers, as it were, the general resurrection into himself; and, as though asserting that all men shall indeed rise, but only through mysterious union with himself, he declares, not that he will effect the resurrection, summoning by his voice the tenantry from the sepulchres, but that he is himself that resurrection: "I am the resurrection, and the life."

Now it were beside our purpose to follow further the narrative of the raising of Lazarus. We have shown you how the words of our text are introduced, and we shall find, that, when detached from the context, they furnish material of thought amply sufficient for a single discourse.

It seems to us, that, in claiming such titles as those which are to come under review, Christ declared himself the cause and the origin of the immortality of our bodies and souls. In announcing himself as "the resurrection," he must be considered as stating that he alone effects the wondrous result of the corruptible putting on incorruption. In announcing himself as "the life," he equally states that he endows the spirit with its happiness, yea rather with its existence, through eternity. If Christ

had only termed himself "the resurrection," we might have considered him as referring merely to the body—asserting it to be a consequence on his work of mediation that the dust of ages shall again quicken into life. But when he terms himself also "the life," we cannot but suppose a reference to the immortality of the soul; so that this noble and sublime fact is, in some way, associated with the achievements of redemption.

We are accustomed, indeed, to think that the immortality of the soul is independent on the atonement; so that, although had there been no redemption there would have been no resurrection, the principle within us would have remained unquenched, subsisting for ever, and for ever accessible to pain and penalty. We shall not pause to examine the justice or injustice of the opinion. We shall only remark that the existence of the soul is, undoubtedly, as dependent upon God as that of the body; that no spirit, except Deity himself, can be necessarily, and inherently, immortal; and that, if it should please the Almighty to put an arrest on those momentary outgoings of life which flow from himself, and permeate the universe, he would instantly once more be alone in infinity, and one vast bankruptcy of being overspread all the provinces of creation. There seems no reason, if we may thus speak, in the nature of things, why the soul should not die. Her life is a derived and dependent life; and that which is derived and dependent may, of course, cease to be

at the will of the author and upholder. And it is far beyond us to ascertain what term of being would have been assigned to the soul, had there arisen no champion and surety of the fallen. We throw ourselves into a region of speculation, across which there runs no discernible pathway, when we inquire whether there would have been an annihilation, supposing there had not been a redemption of man. We can only say that the soul has not, and cannot have, any more than the body, the sources of vitality in herself. We can, therefore, see the possibility, if not prove the certainty, that it is only because "the Word was made flesh<sup>1</sup>," and struggled for us and died, that the human spirit is unquenchable, and that the principle, which distinguishes us from the brutes, shall retain everlastingly its strength and its majesty.

But without travelling into speculative questions, we wish to take our text as a revelation, or announcement, of the immortality of the soul; and to examine how, by joining the terms, resurrection and life, Christ made up what was wanting in the calculations of natural religion, when turned on determining this grand article of faith.

Now with this as our chief object of discourse, we shall endeavour, in the first place, to show briefly the accuracy with which Christ may be designated "the Resurrection." We shall then, in the second

<sup>1</sup> John i. 14.

place, attempt to prove, that the resurrection of the body is a great element in the demonstration of "the life," the immortality of the soul.

We begin by reminding you of a fact, not easily overlooked, that the resurrection is, in the very strictest sense, a consequence on redemption. Had not Christ undertaken the suretyship of our race, there would never have come a time when the dead shall be raised. If there had been no interposition on behalf of the fallen, whatever had become of the souls of men, their bodies must have remained under the tyranny of death. The original curse was a curse of death on the whole man. And it cannot be argued that the curse of the body's death could allow, so long as unrepealed, the body's resurrection. So that we may lay it down as an undisputed truth, that Christ Jesus achieved man's resurrection. He was, emphatically, the author of man's resurrection. Without Christ, and apart from that redemption of our nature which he wrought out by obedience and suffering, there would have been no resurrection. It is just because the Eternal Son took our nature into union with his own, and endured therein the curse provoked by disobedience, that a time is yet to arrive when the buried generations shall throw off the dishonours of corruption.

But we are ready to allow that the proving Christ the cause, or the author of the resurrection, is not, in strict truth, the proving him that resurrection itself. There must be some broad sense in which it

holds good that the resurrection of Christ was the resurrection of all men; otherwise it would be hard to vindicate the thorough accuracy of our text. And if you call to mind the statement of St. Paul, "since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead <sup>1</sup>," you will perceive that the resurrection came by Christ, in exactly the same manner as death had come by Adam. Now we know that death came by Adam as the representative of human nature; and we, therefore, infer that the resurrection came by Christ as the representative of human nature. Retaining always his divine personality, the second person of the Trinity took our nature into union with his own; and in all his obedience, and in all his suffering, occupied this nature in the character, and with the properties, of a head. When he obeyed, it was the nature, and not a human person which obeyed. When he suffered, it was the nature, and not a human person which suffered. So that, when he died, he died as our head; and when he rose, he rose also as our head. And thus—keeping up the alleged parallel between Adam and Christ—as every man dies because concerned in the disobedience of the one, so he rises because included in the ransom of the other. Human nature having been crucified, and buried, and raised in Jesus, all who partake of this nature partake of it in the state into which it has been brought by a Mediator, a

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 21.

state of rescue from the power of the grave, and not of continuance in its dark dishonours. The nature had most literally died in Adam, and this nature did as literally revive in Christ. Christ carried it through all its scenes of trial, and toil, and temptation, up to the closing scene of anguish and death; and then he went down in it into the chambers of its lonely slumbers; and there he brake into shivers the chain which bound it and kept it motionless; and he brought it triumphantly back, the mortal immortalized, the decaying imperishable, and "I am the Resurrection," was then the proclamation to a wondering universe.

We trench not, in the smallest degree, on the special privileges of the godly, when we assert that there is a link which unites Christ with every individual of the vast family of man, and that, in virtue of this link, the graves of the earth shall, at the last day, be rifled of their tenantry. The assertion is that of St. Paul: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death<sup>1</sup>." So that the Redeemer made himself bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh: and he thus united himself with every dweller upon the globe; and, as a consequence on such union, that which he wrought out for his own flesh, he wrought out for all flesh; making, at one and the same time, and by one and the same

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 14.

act, his own immortal, and that of all immortal. He was then, literally, "the Resurrection." His resurrection was the resurrection of the nature, and the resurrection of the nature was the resurrection of all men. Oh, it is an amazing contemplation, one to which even thought must always fail to do justice! The first Adam just laid the blighting hand of disobedience on the root of human nature, and the countless millions of shoots, which were to spring up and cover the earth, were stricken with corruption, and could grow only to wither and decay. The second Adam nurtured the root in righteousness, and watered it with blood. And, lo! a vivifying sap went up into every, the most distant, branch; and over this sap death wields no power; for the sap goes down with the branch into the bosom of the earth, and, at God's appointed time, shall quicken it afresh, and cause it to arise indestructible through eternity. It would be quite inconsistent with the resurrection of the nature—and this it is, you observe, which makes Christ "the Resurrection"—that any individual, partaking that nature, should continue for ever cased up in the sepulchre. And if there never moved upon this earth beings who gave ear to the tidings of salvation; if the successive generations of mankind, without a lonely exception, laughed to scorn the proffers of mercy and forgiveness: still this desperate and unvarying infidelity would have no effect on the resurrection of the species. The bond of flesh is not to be rent by any of the acts of the

most daring rebellion. And in virtue of this union, sure as that the Mediator rose, sure as that he shall return and sit, in awful pomp, on the judgment-seat, so sure is it that the earth shall yet heave at every pore; and that, even had it received in deposit the bodies of none save the unrighteous and the infidel, it would give up the dust with a most faithful accuracy; so that the buried would arise, imperishable in bone and sinew; and the despisers of Christ, being of one flesh with him, must share in the resurrection of that flesh, though, not being of one spirit, they should have no part in its glorification.

You see, then, that Christ is more than the efficient cause of the resurrection; that he is the resurrection: "I am the Resurrection." And we cannot quit this portion of our subject, without again striving to impress upon you the augustness and sublimity of the ascertained fact. The untold myriads of our lineage rose in the resurrection of the new head of our race. Never, oh never, would the sheeted reliques of mankind have walked forth from the vaults and the churchyards; never from the valley and the mountain would there have started the millions who have fallen in the battle; never would the giant-caverns of the unfathomed ocean have yielded up the multitudes, who were swept from the earth when its wickedness grew desperate, or whom stranded navies have bequeathed to the guardianship of the deep; never would the dislocated and decomposed body have shaken off its dishonours, and stood out in



strength and in symmetry, bone coming again to bone, and sinews binding them, and skin covering them—had not He, who so occupied the nature that he could act for the race, descended, in his prowess and his purity, into the chambers of death, and scattering the seeds of a new existence throughout their far-spreading ranges, abandoned them to gloom and silence till a fixed and on-coming day; appointing that then the seeds should suddenly germinate into a rich harvest of undying bodies, and the walls of the chambers falling flat at the trumpet-blast of judgment, disclose the swarming armies of the buried marching onward to the “great white throne”<sup>1</sup>.

But we shall not dwell longer on the fact that Christ Jesus is “the Resurrection.” Our second topic of discourse presents most of difficulty; and we shall, therefore, give it the remainder of our time.

We wish to take our text as an announcement of the immortality of the soul, and to examine how, by joining the terms resurrection and life, Christ supplied what was wanting in the calculations of natural religion. Now we hold no terms with those, who, through an overwrought zeal for the honour of the Gospel, would depreciate the strugglings after knowledge which characterized the days preceding Christianity. There arose, at times, men gifted above their fellows, who threw themselves boldly into

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xx. 11.

the surrounding darkness, and brought out sparklings of truth which they showed to a wondering, yet doubting, world. Thus the immortality of the soul was certainly held by sundry of the ancient philosophers. And though there might be much error compounded with truth, and much feebleness in the notions entertained of spiritual subsistence, it was a great triumph on the part of the soul, that she did at all shake off the trammels of flesh, and, soaring upwards, snatch something like proof of her own high destinies.

We believe that amongst those who enjoyed not the advantages of revelation there was no suspicion of a resurrection, but there was, at least, a surmise of life. We say a surmise of life. For if you examine carefully the limit to which unaided discovery might be pushed, you will find cause to think that a shrewd guess, or a brilliant conjecture, is the highest attainment of natural religion. That mere matter can never have consciousness; that mere matter can never think; that, by no constitution and adjustment of its atoms, can mere matter become capable of acts of understanding and reason; we can have no hesitation in saying that these are self-evident truths of which no candid mind will ask a demonstration. The mind is its own witness that it is something more than matter. And when men have thus proved themselves in part immaterial, they have made a long advance towards proving themselves immortal.

They have ascertained, at least, the existence of a principle, which, not being matter, will not necessarily be affected by the dissolution of matter. And having once determined that there is a portion of man adapted for the soaring away from the ruins of matter, let attention be given to the scrutiny of this portion, and it will be found so capable of noble performances, so fitted for the contemplation of things spiritual and divine, that it shall commend itself to the inquirer as destined to the attainments of a loftier existence. So that we are certain upon the point that man might prove himself in part immaterial, and, therefore, capable of existence when separate from matter. And we are persuaded yet further, that, having shown himself capable of a future existence, he might also show himself capable of an immortal; there being ample reason on the side of the opinion, that the principle, which could survive at all, might go on surviving for ever.

Now this is a brief outline of the argument which might be pursued for the soul's immortality. Man might reason up from matter as insensible to himself as sensible. He might conclude, that, since what is wholly material can never think, he himself, as being able to think, must be, in part, immaterial. And the moment he has made out the point of an immaterial principle actuating matter, he may bring to bear a vast assemblage of proofs, derived alike from the aspirings of this principle and the attributes of

God, all confirmatory of the notion, that the immaterial shall survive when the material has been worn down and sepulchred.

But we think that when a man had reasoned up to a capacity of immortality, he would have reached the furthest possible point. We think that natural religion could just show him that he might live for ever, but certainly not that he would live for ever. He might have been wrought into a persuasion that the principle within him was not necessarily subject to death. But he could not have assured himself that God would not consign this principle to death. It is one thing to prove a principle capable of immortality, and quite another to prove that God will allow it to be immortal. And if man had brought into the account the misdoings of his life : if he had remembered how grievously he had permitted the immaterial to be the slave of the material, giving no homage to the ethereal and magnificent principle, but binding it basely down within the framework of flesh ; why, we may suppose there would have come upon him the fear, we had almost said the hope, that by an act of omnipotence, God would terminate the existence of that which might have been everlasting, and, sending a cankerworm into the long-dishonoured germ, forbid the soul to shoot upwards a plant of immortality.

So that we again say that a capacity, but not a certainty of immortality, would be, probably, the highest discovery arrived at by natural religion. And

just here it was that the Gospel came in, and bringing man tidings from the Father of Spirits, informed him of the irrevocable appointment that the soul, like Deity of which it is the spark, shall go not out and wax not dim. Revealed religion approached as the auxiliary to natural, and confirming all its discoveries of man's capacity of immortality, removed all doubts as to his destinies being everlasting. And thus it were fair to contend, that, up to the coming of Christ, man had done nothing more than carry himself to the border-line of eternity ; and that there he stood a disembodied spirit, full of the amazing consciousness, that, if permitted to spring into the unbounded expanse, he should never be mastered by the immensity of flight ; but hampered, all the while, by the suspicion that there might go out against him a decree of the Omnipotent, binding down the wings of the soul, and forbidding this expatiation over the for ever and for ever of Godhead. So that the Gospel, though it taught not man that he might be, assuredly did teach him that he should be immortal. It brought him not the first tidings of an immaterial principle, but, certainly, it first informed him that nothing should interfere with the immaterial becoming the eternal.

Now you will observe that it has been the object of these remarks, to prove that natural religion did much, and at the same time left much undone, in regard to the disclosure of a future state to man. We have striven, therefore, to show you a point up

to which discovery might be pushed without aid from revelation, but at which, if not thus assisted, it must come necessarily to a stand. And now, if you would bring these statements into connexion with our text, we may again say that natural religion had a surmise of life, but no suspicion of a resurrection; that, if Christ had only said "I am the life," he would have left in darkness and perplexity the question of the soul's immortality; but that by combining two titles, by calling himself "the resurrection and the life," he removed the difficulties from that question, and brought to light the immortality. We wish you to be clear on this great point. We shall, therefore, examine how natural religion came to be deficient, and how the statement of our text supplied what was wanting.

Now we see no better method of prosecuting this inquiry, than the putting one's self into the position of a man who has no guidance but that of natural religion. If there had never shone on me the beams of the Gospel, and if I could only gather my arguments from what I felt within myself, and from what I saw occurring around me, I might advance, step by step, through some such process as the following. I am not wholly a material thing. I can perceive, and reason, and remember. I am conscious to myself of powers which it is impossible that mere matter, however wrought up or moulded, could possess or exercise. There must, then, be within me an immaterial principle, a something which is not matter, a soul, an invisible, mysterious, powerful, pervading thing. And

this soul, I feel that it struggles after immortality. I feel that it urges me to the practice of virtue, however painful, and that it warns me against the pursuit of vice, however pleasant. I feel that it acts upon me by motives, derived from the properties of a God, but which lose all their point and power, unless I am hereafter to be judged and dealt with according to my actions. And if natural religion have thus enabled me, at the least, to conjecture that there shall come a judgment, and a state of retribution, what is it which puts an arrest on my searchings, and forbids my going onward to certainty? We reply without hesitation, death. Natural religion cannot overleap the grave. It is just the fact of the body's dissolution, of the taking down of this fleshly tabernacle, of the resolution of bone, and flesh, and sinew into dust—it is just this fact which shakes all my calculations of a judgment, and throws a darkness not to be penetrated round “life and immortality<sup>1</sup>.” And why so? Why, after showing that I am immaterial—why, after proving that a part of myself spurns from it decay, and is not necessarily affected by the breaking up of the body—why should death interfere with my conviction of the certainties of judgment and retribution? We hold the reason to be simple and easily defined. If there shall come a judgment, of course the beings judged must be the very beings who have lived on this earth. If there shall come a retribution,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.

of course the beings rewarded or punished must be the very beings who have been virtuous or vicious in this present existence. There can be nothing clearer than that the individuals judged, and the individuals recompensed, must be the very individuals who have here moved and acted, the sons and the daughters of humanity. But how can they be? The soul is not the man. There must be the material, as well as the immaterial, to make up man. The vicious person cannot be the suffering person, and the virtuous person cannot be the exalted person, and neither can be the tried person, unless body and soul stand together at the tribunal, constituting hereafter the very person which they constitute here. And if natural religion know nothing of a resurrection—and it does know nothing, the resurrection being purely an article of revelation—we hold that natural religion must here be thrown out of all her calculations, and that confusion and doubt will be the result of her best searchings after truth.

I see that if there be a judgment hereafter, the individuals judged must be the very individuals who have obeyed here, or disobeyed here. But if the material part be dissolved, and there remain nothing but the immaterial, they are not, and they cannot be, the very same individuals. The soul, we again say, is not the man. And if the soul, by itself, stand in judgment, it is not the man who stands in judgment. And if the man stand not in judgment,



there is no putting of the obedient or the offending being upon trial. So that there is at once an overthrow of the reasoning by which I had sustained the expectation, that the future comes charged with the actings of a mighty jurisdiction. I cannot master the mysteries of the sepulchre. I may have sat down in one of the solitudes of nature; and I may have gazed on a firmament and a landscape which seemed to burn with divinity; and I may have heard the whisperings of a more than human voice, telling me that I am destined for companionship with the bright tenantry of a far lovelier scene; and I may then have pondered on myself; there may have throbbed within me the pulses of eternity; I may have felt the soarings of the immaterial, and I may have risen thrilling with the thought that I should yet find myself the immortal. But if, when I went forth to mix again with my fellows—the splendid thought still crowding every chamber of the spirit—I met the spectacle of the dead borne along to their burial; why, this demonstration of human mortality would be as a thunder-cloud passing over my brilliant contemplations; and I should not know how to believe myself reserved for endless allotments, when I saw one of my own lineage coffined and sepulchred. How can this buried man be judged? How can he be put upon trial? His soul may be judged, his soul may be put upon trial. But the soul is not himself. And if it be not him-

self who is judged, judgment proceeds not according to the rigours of justice, and therefore, not according to the attributes of Deity.

And thus the grand reason why natural religion cannot fully demonstrate a judgment to come, and a state of retribution, seems to be that it cannot demonstrate, nay rather, that it cannot even suspect, the resurrection of the body. The great difficulty, whilst man is left to discover for himself, is how to bring upon the platform of the future the identical beings who are shattered by death. So that unless you introduce "the resurrection," you will not make intelligible "the life." The showing that the body will rise is indispensable to the showing, not indeed that the soul is capable of immortality, but that her immortality can consist, as it must consist, with judgment and retribution. We contend, therefore, that the great clearing up of the soul's immortality was Christ's combining the titles of our text, "I am the resurrection and the life." Let man be assured that his body shall rise, and there is an end to those difficulties which throng around him when observing that his body must die. Thus it was "the resurrection" which turned a flood of brightness on "the life." The main thing wanted, in order that men might be assured of immortality, was a grappling with death. It was the showing that there should be no lasting separation between soul and body. It was the exhibiting the sepulchres emptied of their vast population, and giving up the dust remoulded

into human shape. And this it was which the Mediator effected, not so much by announcement as by action, not so much by preaching resurrection and life, as by being "the resurrection and the life." He went down to the grave in the weakness of humanity, but, at the same time, in the might of Deity. And designing to pour forth a torrent of lustre on the life, the everlasting life of man, oh, he did not bid the firmament cleave asunder, and the constellations of eternity shine out in their majesties, and dazzle and blind an overawed creation. He rose up, a moral giant, from his grave-clothes; and proving death vanquished in his own strong-hold, left the vacant sepulchre as a centre of light to the dwellers on this planet. He took not the suns and systems which crowd immensity in order to form one brilliant cataract, which, rushing down in its glories, might sweep away darkness from the benighted race of the apostate. But he came forth from the tomb, masterful and victorious; and the place where he had lain became the focus of the rays of the long-hidden truth: and the fragments of his grave-stone were the stars from which flashed the immortality of man.

It was by teaching men that they should rise again, it was by being himself "the resurrection," that he taught them they should live the life of immortality. This was bringing the missing element into the attempted demonstration; for this was proving that the complete man shall stand to be judged at the judgment-seat of God. And thus it

is, we again say, that the combination of titles in our text makes the passage an intelligible revelation of the soul's immortality. And prophets might have stood upon the earth, proclaiming to the nations that every individual carried within himself a principle imperishable and unconquerable; they might have spoken of a vast and solemn scene of assize; and they might have conjured men by the bliss and the glory, the fire and the shame, of never-ending allotments: but doubt and uncertainty must have overcast the future; unless they could have bidden their audience anticipate a time when the whole globe, its mountains, its deserts, its cities, its oceans, shall seem resolved into the elements of humankind; and millions of eyes look up from a million chasms; and long-severed spirits rush down to the very tenements which encased them in the days of probation: ay, prophets would have spoken in vain of judgment and immortality, unless they could have told out this marvellous leaping into life of whatsoever hath been man; and never could the cloud and the mist have been rolled away from the boundless hereafter, had there not arisen a being who could declare, and make good the declaration, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Now we have been induced to treat on the inspiring words of our text by the consideration that death has, of late, been unusually busy in our metropolis and its environs, and that, therefore, such a subject of address seemed peculiarly calculated to

interest your feelings. We thank thee, and we praise thee, O Lord our Redeemer, that thou hast "abolished death<sup>1</sup>." We laud and magnify thy glorious name, that thou hast wrestled with our tyrant in the citadel of his empire; and that, if we believe upon thee, death has, for us, been spoiled of its power, so that "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory<sup>2</sup>?" may burst from our lips as we expect the dissolution of "our earthly house of this tabernacle<sup>3</sup>." What is it but sin, unpardoned and wrath-deserving sin, which gives death its fearfulness? It is not the mere separation of soul from body, though we own this to be awful and unnatural, worthy man's abhorrence, as causing him, for awhile, to cease to be man. It is not the reduction of this flesh into original elements, earth to earth, fire to fire, water to water, which makes death so terrible, compelling the most stout-hearted to shrink back from his approaches. It is because death is a consequence of sin, and this one consequence involves others a thousand-fold more tremendous—a sea of anger, and waves of fire, and the desperate anguish of a storm-tossed spirit—it is on this account that death is appalling: and they who could contentedly, and even cheerfully, depart from a world which has mocked them, and deceived them, and wearied them, oh, they cannot face a God whom they have disobeyed, and neglected, and scorned.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 55.<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. v. 1.

And if, then, there be the taking away of sin ; if iniquity be blotted out as a cloud, and transgression as a thick cloud ; is not all its bitterness abstracted from death ? And if, yet further, in addition to the pardon of sin, there have been imparted to man a “right to the tree of life<sup>1</sup>,” so that there are reserved for him in heaven the splendours of immortality ; is not the terrible wrenched away from death ? But is not sin pardoned through the blood-shedding of Jesus ? and is not glory secured to us through the intercession of Jesus ? And where, then, is the tongue bold enough to deny, that death is virtually abolished unto those who believe on “the resurrection and the life ?” Oh, the smile can rest brightly on a dying man’s cheek, and the words of rapture can flow from his lips, and his eye can be on angel forms waiting to take charge of his spirit, and his ear can catch the minstrelsy of cherubim ; and what are these but trophies—conquerors of earth, and statesmen, and philosophers, can ye match these trophies ?—of “the resurrection and the life ?”

We look not, indeed, always for triumph and rapture on the death-beds of the righteous. We hold it to be wrong to expect, necessarily, encouragement for ourselves from good men in the act of dissolution. They require encouragement. Christ, when in his agony, did not strengthen others : he needed an angel to strengthen himself. But if there be not

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 14.

ecstasy, there is that composedness, in departing believers, which shows that "the everlasting arms"<sup>1</sup> are under them and around them. It is a beautiful thing to see a Christian die. The confession, whilst there is strength to articulate, that God is faithful to his promises; the faint pressure of the hand, giving the same testimony when the tongue can no longer do its office; the motion of the lips inducing you to bend down, so that you catch broken syllables of expressions such as this, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly;" these make the chamber in which the righteous die one of the most privileged scenes upon earth; and he who can be present, and gather no assurance that death is fettered and manacled, even whilst grasping the believer, must be either inaccessible to moral evidence, or insensible to the most heart-touching appeal.

One after another is withdrawn from the Church below, and heaven is gathering into its capacious bosom the company of the justified. We feel our loss, when those whose experience qualified them to teach, and whose life was a sermon to a neighbourhood, are removed to the courts of the Church above. But we "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope"<sup>2</sup>, as we mark the breaches which death makes on the right hand and on the left. We may, indeed, think that "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come"<sup>3</sup>, and that we ourselves are left to

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 27.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. lvii. 1.

struggle through approaching days of fear and perplexity. Be it so. We are not alone. He who is "the resurrection and the life" leads us on to the battle and the grave. It might accord better with our natural feelings, that they who have instructed us by example, and cheered by exhortation, should remain to counsel and to animate, when the tide of war swells highest, and the voice of blasphemy is loudest. We feel that we can but ill spare the matured piety of the veteran Christian, and the glowing devotion of younger disciples. Yet we will say with Asa, when there came against him Zerah the Ethiopian, with an host of a hundred thousand and three hundred chariots, "Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude<sup>1</sup>."

"The Resurrection and the Life," these are thy magnificent titles, Captain of our salvation! And, therefore, we commit to thee body and soul; for thou hast redeemed both, and thou wilt advance both to the noblest and most splendid of portions. Who quails and shrinks, scared by the despotism of death? Who amongst you fears the dashings of those cold black waters which roll between us and the promised land? Men and brethren, grasp your own privileges. Men and brethren, Christ Jesus has "abolished

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xiv. 11.



death:" will ye, by your faithlessness, throw strength into the skeleton, and give back empire to the dethroned and destroyed? Yes, "the resurrection and the life" "abolished death." Ye must indeed die, and so far death remains undestroyed. But if the terrible be destroyed when it can no longer terrify, and if the injurious be destroyed when it can no longer injure; if the enemy be abolished when it does the work of a friend, and if the tyrant be abolished when performing the offices of a servant; if the repulsive be destroyed when we can welcome it, and if the odious be destroyed when we can embrace it; if the quicksand be abolished when we can walk it and sink not, if the fire be abolished when we can pass through it and be scorched not, if the poison be abolished when we can drink it and be hurt not; then is death destroyed, then is death abolished, to all who believe on "the resurrection and the life:" and the noble prophecy is fulfilled (bear witness, ye groups of the ransomed, bending down from your high citadel of triumph), "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction<sup>1</sup>."

"I heard a voice from heaven"—oh, for the angel's tongue that words so beautiful might have all their melodiousness—"saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their

<sup>1</sup> Hosea xiii. 14.

labours; and their works do follow them<sup>1</sup>." It is yet but a little while, and we shall be delivered from the burden and the conflict, and, with all those who have preceded us in the righteous struggle, enjoy the deep raptures of a Mediator's presence. Then, reunited to the friends with whom we took sweet counsel upon earth, we shall recount our toil only to heighten our ecstasy, and call to mind the tug and the din of the war, only that, with a more bounding throb and a richer song, we may feel and celebrate the wonders of redemption. And when the morning of the first resurrection breaks on this long-disordered and groaning creation, then shall our text be understood in all its majesty, and in all its marvel: and then shall the words—whose syllables mingle so often with the funeral knell that we are disposed to carve them on the cypress-tree rather than on the palm—"I am the resurrection and the life," form the chorus of that noble anthem, which those for whom Christ "died and rose and revived"<sup>2</sup> shall chaunt as they march from judgment to glory.

We add nothing more. We show you the privileges of the righteous. We tell you that if you would die their death, you must live their life. And, conjuring you, by the memory of those who have gone hence in the faith of the Redeemer, that ye "run with patience the race set before you"<sup>3</sup>, we send you to your homes with the comforting words

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xiv. 13.<sup>2</sup> Rom. xiv. 9.<sup>3</sup> Heb. xii. 1.

which succeed our text, "He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die; believest thou this?" God forbid there should be one of you refusing to answer with Martha, "Yea, Lord, yea."

## SERMON VI.

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THE POWER OF WICKEDNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS TO  
REPRODUCE THEMSELVES.

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GALATIANS vi. 7.

“For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

YOU may be all aware that what is termed the argument from analogy has been carried out to great length by thinking men, and that much of the strongest witness for Christianity has been won on this field of investigation. It is altogether a most curious and profitable inquiry, which sets itself to the tracing out resemblances between natural and spiritual things, and which thus proposes to establish, at the least, a probability that creation and Christianity have one and the same author. And we think that we shall not overstep the limits of truth, if we declare that nature wears the appearance of having been actually designed for the illustration of the Bible. We believe that he who, with a devout mind, searches most diligently into the beauties and mysteries of the material world, will find himself met constantly by exhibitions, which seem to him the pages of Scripture written in the stars, and the

forests, and the waters, of this creation. There is such a sameness of dealing characteristic of the natural and the spiritual, that the Bible may be read in the outspread of the landscape, and the operations of agriculture: whilst, conversely, the laws obeyed by this earth and its productions may be traced as pervading the appointments of revelation. It were beside our purpose to go at length into demonstration of this coincidence. But you may all perceive, assuming its existence, that the furnished argument is clear and convincing. If there run the same principle through natural and spiritual things, through the book of nature and the Bible, we vindicate the same authorship to both, and prove, with an almost geometric precision, that the God of creation is also the God of Christianity. I look on the natural firmament with its glorious inlay of stars; and it is unto me as the breastplate of the great high priest, "ardent with gems oracular," from which, as from the urim and thummim on Aaron's ephod, come messages full of divinity. And when I turn to the page of Scripture, and perceive the nicest resemblance between the characters in which this page is written, and those which glitter before me on the crowded concave, I feel that, in trusting myself to the declarations of the Bible, I cling to Him who speaks to me from every point, and by every splendour, of the visible universe, whose voice is in the marchings of planets, and the rushing of whose melodies is in the wings of the daylight.

But though we go not into the general inquiry, we take one great principle, the principle of a resurrection, and we affirm, in illustration of what has been advanced, that it runs alike through God's natural and spiritual dealings. Just as God hath appointed that man's body, after mouldering away, shall come forth quickened and renewed, so has he ordained that the seed, after corrupting in the ground, shall yield a harvest of the like kind with itself. It is, moreover, God's ordinary course to allow an apparent destruction as preparatory, or introductory, to complete success or renovation. He does not permit the springing up, until there has been, on human calculation, a thorough withering away. So that the maxim might be shown to hold universally good, "that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die<sup>1</sup>." We may observe yet further, that, as with the husbandman, if he sow the corn, he shall reap the corn, and if he sow the weed, he shall reap the weed; thus with myself as a responsible agent, if I sow the corruptible, I shall reap the corruptible; and if I sow the imperishable, I shall reap the imperishable. The seed reproduces itself. This is the fact in reference to spiritual things, on which we would fasten your attention; "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Now we are all, to a certain extent, familiar with this principle; for it is forced on our notice by every-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 36.

day occurrences. We observe that a dissolute and reckless youth is ordinarily followed by a premature and miserable old age. We see that honesty and industry win commonly comfort and respect; and that, on the contrary, levity and a want of carefulness produce pauperism and disrepute. And yet further, unless we go over to the ranks of infidelity, we cannot question that a course of disobedience to God is earning man's eternal destruction; whilst, through submission to the revealed will of his Maker, there is secured admittance into a glorious heritage. We are thus aware that there runs through the Creator's dealings with our race the principle of an identity, or sameness, between the things which man sows and those which he reaps. But we think it possible that we may have contented ourselves with too superficial a view of this principle; and that, through not searching into what may be termed its philosophy, we allow much that is important to elude observation. The seed sown in the earth goes on, as it were, by a sort of natural process, and without direct interference from God, to yield seed of the same description with itself. And we wish it well observed, whether there be not in spiritual things an analogy the most perfect to what thus takes place in natural. We think that, upon a careful examination, you will find groundwork of belief that the simile holds good in every possible respect: so that what a man sows, if left to its own vegetating powers, will

yield, naturally, a harvest of its own kind and description.

We shall study to establish this point in regard, first, to the present scene of probation ; and secondly, to the future scene of recompense.

We begin with the present scene of probation, and will put you in possession of the exact point to be made out, by referring you to the instance of Pharaoh. We know that whilst God was acting on the Egyptians by the awful apparatus of plague and prodigy, he is often said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that the monarch refused to let Israel go. And it is a great question to decide, whether God actually interfered to strengthen and confirm the obstinacy of Pharaoh, or only left the king to the workings of his own heart, as knowing that one degree of unbelief would generate another and a stauncher. It seems to us at variance with all that is revealed of the Creator, to suppose him urging on the wicked in his wickedness, or bringing any engine to bear on the ungodly which shall make them more desperate in rebellion. God willeth not the death of any sinner. And though after long striving with an individual, after plying him with the various excitements which are best calculated to stir a rational, and agitate an immortal being, he may withdraw all the aids of the Spirit, and so give him over to that worst of all tyrants, himself ; yet this, we contend, must be the extreme thing ever done by the Almighty to man, the leaving him, but not the con-



straining him, to do evil. And when, therefore, it is said that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and when the expression is repeated, so as to mark a continued and on-going hardening, we have no other idea of the meaning than that God, moved by the obstinacy of Pharaoh, withdrew from him, gradually, all the restraints of his grace; and that, as these restraints were more and more removed, the heart of the king was more and more hardened. We look upon the instance as a precise illustration of the truth, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Pharaoh sowed obstinacy, and Pharaoh reaped obstinacy. The seed was put into the soil; and there was no need, any more than with the grain of corn, that God should interfere with any new power. Nothing more was required than that the seed should be left to vegetate, to act out its own nature. And though God, had he pleased, might have counteracted this nature, yet, when he resolved to give up Pharaoh to his unbelief, he had nothing to do but to let alone this nature. The seed of infidelity, which Pharaoh had sown when he rejected the first miracles, was left to itself, and to its own vegetation. It sent up, accordingly, a harvest of its own kind, a harvest of infidelity, and Pharaoh was not to be persuaded by any of the subsequent miracles. So that, when the monarch went on from one degree of hardness to another, till at length, advancing through the cold ranks of the prostrated first-born, he pursued, across the blackened and devastated

territory, the people for whose emancipation there had been the visible making bare of the arm of Omnipotence, he was not an instance—perish the thought!—of a man compelled by his Maker to offend and be lost; but simply a witness to the truth of the principle, that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Now that which took place in the case of this Egyptian is, we argue, precisely what occurs in regard generally to the impenitent. God destroys no man. Every man who is destroyed must destroy himself. When a man stifles an admonition of conscience, he may fairly be said to sow the stiflings of conscience. And when conscience admonishes him the next time, it will be more feebly and faintly. There will be a less felt difficulty in overpowering the admonition. And the feebleness of remonstrance, and the facility of resistance, will increase on every repetition; not because God interferes to make man callous, but because the thing sown was stifling of conscience, and therefore the thing reaped is stifling of conscience. The Holy Spirit strives with every man. Conscience is but the voice of Deity heard above the din of human passions. But let conscience be resisted, and the Spirit is grieved. Then, as with Pharaoh, there is an abstraction of that influence by which evil is kept under. And thus there is a less and less counteraction to the vegetating power of the seed, and, therefore, a more and more abundant upspringing of that which was sown. So that though there

must be a direct and mighty interference of Deity for the salvation of a man, there is no such interference for his destruction. God must sow the seed of regeneration, and enable a man, according to the phraseology of the verse succeeding our text, to sow "to the Spirit." But man sows for himself the seed of impenitence, and of himself, "he soweth to his flesh." And what he sows, he reaps. If, as he grows older, he grow more confirmed in his wickedness; if warnings come upon him with less and less energy; if the solemnities of the judgment lose more and more their power of alarming him, and the terrors of hell their power of affrighting him; why, the man is nothing else but an exhibition of the thickening of the harvest of which himself sowed the seed; and he puts forth, in this his confirmed and settled impenitence, a demonstration, legible by every careful observer, that there needs no apparatus for the turning a man gradually from the clay to the adamant, over and above the apparatus of his own heart, left to itself, and let alone to harden.

We greatly desire that you should rightly understand what the agency is through which the soul is destroyed. It is not that God hath sent out a decree against a man. It is not that he throws a darkness before his eyes which cannot be penetrated, and a chillness into his blood which cannot be thawed, and a torpor into his limbs which cannot be overcome. Harvest-time bringing an abundant produce of what was sown in the seed-time—this, we con-

tend, is the sum-total of the mystery. God interferes not, as it were, with the processes of nature. He opposes not, or, to speak more correctly, he withdraws gradually his opposition to, the vegetation of the seed. And this is all. There is nothing more needed. You resist a motion of the Spirit. Well then, this facilitates further resistance. He who has resisted once will have less difficulty in resisting the second time, and less than that the third time, and less than that the fourth time. So that there comes a harvest of resistances, and all from the single grain of the first resistance. You indulge yourselves once in a known sin. Why, you will be more easily overpowered by the second temptation, and again more easily by the third, and again more easily by the fourth. And what is this but a harvest of sinful indulgences, and all from the one grain of the first indulgence? You omit some portion of spiritual exercises, of prayer, or of the study of the word. The omission will grow upon you. You will omit more to-morrow, and more the next day, and still more the next. And thus there will be a harvest of omissions, and all from the solitary grain of the first omission. And if, through the germinating power of that which man sows, he proceed naturally from bad to worse; if resistance produce resistance, and indulgence indulgence, and omission omission; shall it be denied that the sinner, throughout the whole history of his experience, throughout his progress across the waste of worldliness and obduracy and impeni-

tence—passing on, as he does, to successive stages of indifference to God, and fool-hardiness, and recklessness—is nothing else but the mower of the fruits of his own husbandry, and thus witnesses, with a power which outdoes all the power of language, that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap?”

It is in this manner that we go into what we term the philosophy of our text, when applied to the present scene of probation. We take the seed in the soil. We show you, that by a natural process, without the interference of God, and simply through his ceasing to counteract the tendencies, there is produced a wide crop of the same grain as was sown. And thus—all kinds of opposition to God propagating themselves—he who becomes wrought up into an infidel hardihood, or lulled into a sepulchral apathy, is nothing but the sower living on to be the reaper, the husbandman in the successive stages of an agriculture wherein the ploughing, and the planting, and the gathering, are all his own achievement, and all his own destruction.

Now we have confined ourselves to the supposition that the thing sown is wickedness. But you will see at once, that, with a mere verbal alteration, whatever has been advanced illustrates our text when the thing sown is righteousness. If a man resist temptation, there will be a facility of resisting ever augmenting as he goes on with self-denial. Every new achievement of principle will smooth the way to future achievements of the like kind; and

the fruit of each moral victory—for we may consider the victory as a seed that is sown—is to place us on loftier vantage-ground for the triumphs of righteousness in days yet to come. We cannot perform a virtuous act, without gaining fresh sinew for the service of virtue; just as we cannot perform a vicious, without riveting faster to ourselves the fetters of vice. And, assuredly, if there be thus such a growing strength in habit that every action makes way for its repetition, we may declare of virtue and righteousness that they reproduce themselves; and is not this the same thing as proving that what we sow, that also do we reap?

We would yet further remark, under this head of discourse, that the principle of reaping what we sow is specially to be traced through all the workings of philanthropy. We are persuaded that, if an eminently charitable man experienced great reverse of circumstances, so that from having been the affluent and the benefactor he became the needy and dependent, he would attract towards himself, in his distress, all the sympathies of a neighbourhood. And whilst the great man, who had had nothing but his greatness to recommend him, would be unpitied or uncared-for in disaster; and the avaricious man, who had grasped tightly his wealth, would meet only ridicule when it had escaped from his hold; the philanthropic man, who had used his riches as a steward, would form, in his penury, a sort of focus for the kindness of a thousand hearts; and multi-

tudes would press forward to tender him the succour which he had once given to others; and thus there would be a mighty reaping into his own granaries of that very seed which he had been assiduous in sowing.

We go on to observe, that it is the marvellous property of spiritual things, though we can scarcely affirm it of natural, that the effort to teach them to others gives enlargement to our own sphere of information. We are persuaded that the most experienced Christian cannot sit down with the neglected and grossly ignorant labourer—nay, not with the child in a Sunday or infant-school—and strive to explain and enforce the great truths of the Bible, without finding his own views of the Gospel amplified and cleared through this engagement in the business of tuition. The mere trying to make a point plain to another will oftentimes make it far plainer than ever to ourselves. In illustrating a doctrine of Scripture, in endeavouring to bring it down to the level of a weak or undisciplined understanding, you will find that doctrine presenting itself to your own minds with a new power, and unimagined beauty; and though you may have read the standard writers on theology, and mastered the essays of the most learned divines, yet shall such fresh and vigorous apprehensions of truth be derived often from the effort to press it home on the intellect and conscience of the ignorant, that you shall pronounce the cottage of the untaught peasant your

best school-house, and the questions even of a child your most searching catechisings on the majestic and mysterious things of our faith. And as you tell over to the poor cottager the story of the incarnation and crucifixion, and inform him of the nature and effects of Adam's apostasy; or even find yourself required to adduce more elementary truths, pressing on the neglected man the being of a God, and the immortality of the soul; oh, it shall constantly occur that you will feel a keener sense than ever of the preciousness of Christ, or a greater awe at the majesties of Jehovah, or a loftier bounding of spirit at the thought of your own deathlessness: and if you feel tempted to count it strange that in teaching another you teach also yourself, and that you carry away from your intercourse with the mechanic, or the child, such an accession to your own knowledge, or your own love, as shall seem to make you the indebted party, and not the obliging; then you have only to remember—and the remembrance will sweep away surprise—that it is a fixed appointment of the Almighty, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

In respect, moreover, to alms-giving, we may assert that there is evidently such a present advantage in communicating of our temporal good things, that the giver becomes the receiver, and thus the principle under review finds a fresh illustration. The general comfort and security of society depend so greatly on the well-being of the lower orders, that the rich con-



sult most for themselves when they consult most for the poor. There must be restlessness and anxiety in the palace, whilst misery oppresses the great mass of a population. And every effort to increase the happiness, and heighten the character of the poor, will tell powerfully on the condition of those by whom it is made; seeing that the contentment and good order of the peasantry of a country give value to the revenues of its nobles and merchants. For our own part, we never look on a public hospital or infirmary, we never behold the alms-houses into which old age may be received, and the asylums which have been thrown up on all sides for the widow and the orphan, without feeling that, however generously the rich come forward to the relief of the poor, they advantage themselves whilst providing for the suffering and destitute. These buildings, which are the best diadem of our country, not only bring blessings on the land, by serving, it may be, as electrical conductors which turn from us many flashes of the lightning of wrath; but, being as centres whence succours are sent through distressed portions of our community, they are fostering-places of kindly dispositions towards the wealthier ranks; and may, therefore, be so considered as structures in which a kingdom's prosperity is nursed, that the fittest inscription over their gateways would be this, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Now, before we turn to the second topic of dis-

course, we would make a close application of some of our foregoing statements. You perceive the likelihood, or rather the certainty, to be, that in all cases, there will be a self-propagating power in evil, so that the wrong done shall be parent to a line of misdoings. We have shown you, for example, that to stifle a conviction is the first step in a pathway which leads directly to stupefaction of conscience. And we desire to fasten on this fact, and so to exhibit it that all may discern their near concernment therewith. We remark that men will flock in crowds to the public preaching of the word, though the master natural passion, whatsoever it be, retain undisputed the lordship of their spirits. And this passion may be avarice, or it may be voluptuousness, or ambition, or envy, or pride. But, however characterized, the dominant lust is brought into the sanctuary, and exposed, so to speak, to the exorcisms of the preacher. And who shall say what a disturbing force the sermon will oftentimes put forth against the master-passion; and how frequently the word of the living God, delivered in earnestness and affection, shall have almost made a breach in the strong-holds of Satan? Ay, we believe that often, when a minister, gathering himself up in the strength of his master, launches the thunderbolt of truth against vice and unrighteousness, there is a vast stirring of heart through the listening assembly; and that as he reasons of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come<sup>1</sup>," though

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxiv. 25.

the natural ear catch no sounds of anxiety and alarm, attendant angels, who watch the workings of the gospel, hear the deep beatings of many souls, and almost start at the bounding throb of aroused and agitated spirits. If Satan ever tremble for his ascendancy, it is when the preacher has riveted the attention of the unconverted individual; and, after describing and denouncing the covetous, or pouring out the torrent of his speech on an exhibition of the voluptuary, or exposing the madness and misery of the proud, comes down on that individual with the startling announcement, "Thou art the man!" And the individual goes away from the sanctuary, convinced of the necessity of subduing the master-passion; and he will form, and for awhile act upon, the resolution of wrestling against pride, or of mortifying lust, or of renouncing avarice. But he proceeds in his own strength, and, having no consciousness of the inabilities of his nature, seeks not to God's Spirit for assistance. In a little time, therefore, all the impression wears away. He saw only the danger of sin: he went not on to see its vileness. And the mind soon habituates itself, or soon grows indifferent, to the contemplation of danger, and, above all, when perhaps distant. Hence the man will return quickly to his old haunts. And whether it be to money-making that he again gives himself, or to sensuality, or to ambition, he will enter on the pursuit with an eagerness heightened by abstinence; and thus the result shall be practically the same, as though, having sown moral stupor, he were reaping in a harvest

tremendously luxuriant. And, oh, if the man, after this renouncement and restoration of the master-passion, come again to the sanctuary; and if again the preacher denounce, with a righteous vehemence, every working of ungodliness; and the fire be in his eye, and the thunder on his tongue, as he makes a stand for God and for truth, against a reckless and semi-infidel generation; alas! the man who has felt convictions and sown their stiflings, will be more inaccessible than ever, and more impervious. He will have been hardened through the vegetating process which has gone on in his soul. A far mightier apparatus than before will be required to make the lightest impression. And when you think that there the man is now sitting, unmoved by the terrors of the word; that he can listen with indifference to the very truths which once agitated him; and that, as a consequence on the reproduction of the seed, there is more of the marble in his composition than before, and more of the ice, and more of the iron, so that the likelihood of salvation is fearfully diminished; ye can need no other warning against trifling with convictions, and thus making light of the appointment, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

But we proposed to examine, in the second place, the application of the principle of our text to the future scene of recompense. There can be no question that the reference of the apostle is, specially, to the retributions of another state of being. The

present life is emphatically the seed-time, the next life the harvest-time. And the matter we now have in hand is the ascertaining, whether it be by the natural process of the thing sown yielding the thing reaped, that sinfulness here shall give torment hereafter.

You will observe that, in showing the application of the principle under review to the present scene of probation, we proved that the utmost which God does towards confirming a man in impenitence is the leaving him to himself, the withdrawing from him gradually the remonstrances of his Spirit. The man is literally his own hardener, and, therefore, literally his own destroyer. And we now enquire, whether or no he will be his own punisher? We seem required, if we would maintain rigidly the principle of our text, to suppose that what is reaped in the future shall be identical with what is sown in the present. It cannot be questioned that this is a fair representation. The seed reproduces itself. It is the same grain which the grower scatters, and the reaper collects. We may, therefore, lay it down as the statement of our text, that what is reaped in the next life shall be literally of the same kind with what is sown in this life. But if this be correct, it must follow that a man's sinfulness shall be a man's punishment. And there is no lack of scriptural evidence on the side of the opinion, that the leaving the wicked, throughout eternity, to the mutual recriminations, to the workings and boilings of over-

wrought passions, to the scorpion-sting of an undying remorse, and all the native and inborn agonies of vice—that this, without the interference of a divinely-sent ministry of vengeance, may make that pandemonium which is sketched to us by all that is terrible and ghastly in imagery; and that tormenting, only through giving up the sinner to be his own tormentor, God may fulfil all the ends of a retributive economy, awarding to wickedness its merited condemnation, and displaying to the universe the dreadfulfulness of rebellion.

It may be, we say, that there shall be required no direct interferences on the part of God. It may be that the Almighty shall not commission an avenging train to goad and lacerate the lost. The sinner is hardened by being left to himself; and may it not be that the sinner shall be punished by being left to himself? We think assuredly that the passage before us leads straightway to such a conclusion. We may have habituated ourselves to the idea that God shall take, as it were, into his own hands the punishment of the condemned, and that, standing over them as the executioner of the sentence, he will visit body and soul with the inflictions of wrath. But it consists far better with the character of God, that judgment should be viewed as the natural produce of sinfulness, so that, without any divine interference, the sinfulness will generate the judgment. Let sinfulness alone, and it will become punishment.

Such is, probably, the true account of this awful matter. The thing reaped is the thing sown. And if the thing sown be sinfulness, and if the thing reaped be punishment, then the punishment, after all, must be the sinfulness; and that fearful apparatus of torture which is spoken of in Scripture, the apparatus of a worm that dieth not, and of a fire that is not quenched, this may be just a man's own guilt, the things sown in this mortal life, sprung up and waving in an immortal harvest. We think this a point of great moment. It were comparatively little to say of an individual who sells himself to work evil, and carries it with a high hand and a brazen front against the Lord of the whole earth, that he shuts himself up to a certain and definite destruction. The thrilling truth is, that in working iniquity, he sows for himself anguish. He gives not way to a new desire, he allows not a fresh victory to lust, without multiplying the amount of final torment. By every excursion of passion, and by every indulgence of an unhallowed craving, and by all the misdoings of a hardened or dissolute life, he may be literally said to pour into the granary of his future destinies the goads and stings which shall madden his spirit. He lays up more food for self-reproach. He widens the field over which thought will pass in bitterness, and mow down remorse. He teaches the worm to be ingenious in excruciating, by tasking his wit that he may be ingenious in sinning—for some men, as the prophet

saith—and it is a wonderful expression—“are wise to do evil<sup>1</sup>.” And thus, his iniquities opening, as it were, fresh inlets for the approaches of vengeance, with the growth of wickedness will be the growth of punishment: and at last it will appear that his resistance to convictions, his neglect of opportunities, and his determined enslavement to evil, have literally worked for him “a far more exceeding and eternal weight” of despair.

But even this expresses not clearly and fully what seems taught by our text. We are searching for an identity, or sameness, between what is sown and what is reaped. We, therefore, yet further observe, that it may not be needful that a material rack should be prepared for the body, and fiery spirits gnaw upon the soul. It may not be needful that the Creator should appoint distinct and extraneous arrangements for torture. Let what we call the husbandry of wickedness go forward; let the sinner reap what the sinner has sown; and there is a harvest of anguish for ever to be gathered. Who discerns not that punishment may thus be sinfulness, and that, therefore, the principle of our text may hold good, to the very letter, in a scene of retribution? A man “sows to the flesh:” this is the apostle’s description of sinfulness. He is “of the flesh to reap corruption;” this is his description of punishment. He “sows to the flesh,” by pampering the lusts of the flesh; and he “reaps of the flesh,” when these pampered lusts

<sup>1</sup> Jer. iv. 22.



fall on him with fresh cravings, and demand of him fresh gratifications. But suppose this reaping continued in the next life, and is not the man mowing down a harvest of agony? Let all those passions and desires, which it has been the man's business upon earth to indulge, hunger and thirst for gratification hereafter, and will ye seek elsewhere for the parched tongue beseeching fruitlessly one drop of water? Let the envious man keep his envy, and the jealous man his jealousy, and the revengeful man his revengefulness; and each has a worm which shall eat out everlastingly the very core of his soul. Let the miser have still his thoughts upon gold, and the drunkard his upon the wine-cup, and the sensualist his upon voluptuousness; and a fire-sheet is round each which shall never be extinguished. We know not whether it be possible to conjure up a more terrific image of a lost man, than by supposing him everlastingly preyed upon by the master-lust which has here held him in bondage. We think that you have before you the spectacle of a being, hunted, as it were, by a never-wearied fiend, when you imagine that there rages in the licentious and profligate—only wrought into a fury which has no parallel upon earth—that very passion which it was the concern of a life-time to indulge, but which it must now be the employment of an eternity to deny. We are persuaded that you reach the summit of all that is tremendous in conception, when you suppose a man consigned to the tyranny of a lust which cannot be

conquered, and which cannot be gratified. It is, literally, surrendering him to a worm which dies not, to a fire which is not quenched. And whilst the lust does the part of a ceaseless tormentor, the man, unable longer to indulge it, will writhe in remorse at having endowed it with sovereignty : and thus there will go on (though not in our power to conceive, and, O God, grant it may never be our lot to experience) the cravings of passion with the self-reproachings of the soul ; and the torn and tossed creature shall for ever long to gratify lust, and for ever bewail his madness in gratifying it.

Now you must perceive that, in thus sketching the possible nature of future retribution, we only show that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” We prove that sinfulness may be punishment, so that the things reaped shall be identical with the things sown, according to the words of the prophet Hosea, “they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind<sup>1</sup>.” We reckon that the principle of our text, when rigidly applied, requires us to suppose the retribution of the ungodly the natural produce of their actions. It shall not, perhaps, be that God will interpose with an apparatus of judgments, any more than he now interposes with an apparatus for hardening, or confirming in impenitence. Indifference, if let alone, will produce obduracy ; and obduracy, if let alone, will produce tor-

<sup>1</sup> Hosea viii. 7.

ment. Obduracy is indifference multiplied : and thus it is the harvest from the grain. Torment is obduracy perpetuated and bemoaned : and this again is harvest—the grain reproduced, but with thorns round the ear. Thus, from first to last, “whatsoever a man soweth, that also does he reap.” We should be disposed to plead for the sound divinity, as well as the fine poetry, of words which Milton puts into the mouth of Satan, when approaching to the survey of Paradise : “Which way I fly is hell ; myself am hell.” “Myself am hell !” It is the very idea which we have extracted from our text ; the idea of a lost creature being his own tormentor, his own place of torment. There shall be needed no retinue of wrath to heap on the fuel, or tighten the rack, or sharpen the goad. He cannot escape from himself, and himself is hell.

We would add, that our text is not the only scriptural passage which intimates that sinfulness shall spring up into punishment, exactly as the seed sown produces the harvest. In the first chapter of the Book of Proverbs, the eternal wisdom marks out in terrible language the doom of the scorners : “I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh<sup>1</sup>.” And then, when he would describe their exact punishment, he says, “they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices<sup>2</sup>.” They reap, you see, what they sow :

<sup>1</sup> Prov. i. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. i. 31.

their torments are "their own devices." We have a similar expression in the Book of Job: "Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity and sow wickedness reap the same <sup>1</sup>." Thus again in the Book of Proverbs: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways <sup>2</sup>." We may add that solemn verse in the last chapter of the Book of Revelation, which seems to us exactly to the point. It is spoken in the prospect of Christ's immediate appearing. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still <sup>3</sup>." The master-property is here represented as remaining the master-property. The unjust continues for ever the unjust; the filthy for ever the filthy. So that the indulged principle keeps fast its ascendancy, as though, according to our foregoing supposition, it is to become the tormenting principle. The distinguishing characteristic never departs. When it can no longer be served and gratified by its slave, it wreaks its disappointment tremendously on its victim.

There is thus a precise agreement between our text, as now expounded, and other portions of the Bible which refer to the same topic. We have indeed, as you will observe, dealt chiefly with the sowing and the reaping of the wicked, and but just alluded to those of the righteous. It would not,

<sup>1</sup> Job iv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xiv. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. xxii. 11.

however, be difficult to prove to you, that inasmuch as holiness is happiness, godliness shall be reward, even as sinfulness shall be punishment. And it is clear that the Apostle designed to include both cases under his statement ; for he subjoins as its illustration, “he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” We cannot indeed plead, in the second case, for as rigid an application of the principle as in the first. We cannot argue, that is, for what we call the natural process of vegetation. There must be constant interferences on the part of Deity. God himself, rather than man, is the sower. And unless God were continually busy with the seed, it could never germinate, and send up a harvest of glory. We think that this distinction between the cases is intimated by St. Paul. The one man sows “to the flesh ;” himself the husbandman, himself the territory. The other sows “to the Spirit,” to the Holy Ghost ; and here there is a superinduced soil which differs altogether from the natural. But if there be not, in each case, precisely the same, there is sufficient rigour of application to bear out the assertion of our text. We remember that it was “a crown of righteousness”<sup>1</sup> which sparkled before St. Paul ; and we may, therefore, believe, that the righteousness, which God’s grace has nourished in the heart, will grow into re

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 8.

compense, just as the wickedness, in which the transgressor has indulged, will shoot into torment. So that, although it were easy to speak at greater length on the case of true believers, we may lay it down as a demonstrated truth, whether respect be had to the godly or the disobedient of the earth, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

And now, what mean ye to reap in that grand harvest-day, the day of judgment? Every one of you is sowing either to the flesh, or to the Spirit; and every one of you must, hereafter, take the sickle in his hand, and mow down the produce of his husbandry. We will speak no longer on things of terror. We have said enough to alarm the indifferent. And we pray God that the careless amongst you may find these words of the prophet ringing in their ears, when they lie down to rest this night, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved<sup>1</sup>." But, ere we conclude, we would address a word to the men of God, and animate them to the toils of tillage by the hopes of reaping. We know that it is with much opposition from indwelling corruption, with many thwartings from Satan and your own evil hearts, that ye prosecute the work of breaking up your fallow ground, and sowing to yourselves in righteousness. Ye have to deal with a stubborn soil. The prophet Amos asks, "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough

<sup>1</sup> Jer. viii. 20.

there with oxen<sup>1</sup>?" Yet this is precisely what you have to do. It is the rock, "the heart of stone," which you must bring into cultivation. Yet be ye not dismayed. Above all things, pause not, as though doubtful whether to prosecute a labour which seems to grow as it is performed. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven<sup>2</sup>." Rather comfort yourselves with that beautiful declaration of the Psalmist, "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy<sup>3</sup>." Rather call to mind the saying of the Apostle, "ye are God's husbandry<sup>4</sup>." It is God, who, by his Spirit, ploughs the ground, and sows the seed, and imparts the influences of sun and shower. "My Father," said Jesus, "is the husbandman<sup>5</sup>;" and can ye not feel assured that He will give the increase? Look ye on to the harvest-time. What though the winter be dreary and long, and there seem no shooting of the fig-tree to tell you that summer is nigh? Christ shall yet speak to his Church in that loveliest of poetry, "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land<sup>6</sup>." Then shall be the harvest. We cannot tell you the glory of the things which ye shall reap. We cannot show you the wavings of the golden corn. But this we know,

<sup>1</sup> Amos vi. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm cxxvi. 5.

<sup>5</sup> John xv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ix. 62.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cant. ii. 11, 12.

that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us<sup>1</sup>;" and, therefore, brethren beloved in the Lord, "be ye not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. vi. 9.



## SERMON VII.

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THE POWER OF RELIGION TO STRENGTHEN THE HUMAN  
INTELLECT.

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PSALM cxix. 130.

“The entrance of thy words giveth light ; it giveth understanding  
to the simple.”

THERE is no point of view under which the Bible can be surveyed, and not commend itself to thinking minds as a precious and wonderful book. Travelling down to us across the waste of far-off centuries, it brings the history of times which must otherwise have been given up to conjecture and fable. Instructing us as to the creation of the magnificent universe, and defining the authorship of that rich furniture, as well material as intellectual, with which this universe is stored, it delivers our minds from those vague and unsatisfying theories which reason, unaided in her searchings, proposed with respect to the origin of all things. Opening up, moreover, a sublime and simple system of theology, it emancipates the world from degrading superstitions,

which, dishonouring Deity by the representations propounded of his character, turn vice into virtue, and so banish what is praiseworthy from human society.

And thus, if you kept out of sight the more important ends subserved by the disclosures of the Bible, there would be no single gift for which men stood so indebted to the Almighty as for the revelation of himself in the pages of Scripture. The great engine of civilisation is still the written word of the Most High. And if you visit a tribe of our race in the lowest depths of barbarism, and desire to bring up the debased creatures, and place them on their just level in the scale of existence, it is not by the enactments of earthly legislation, any more than by the tyrannizings of earthly might, that you may look to bring speedily round the wished-for result. The effective machinery is Christianity, and Christianity alone. Propagate the tenets of this religion, as registered in the Bible, and a mighty regeneration will go out over the face of the long-degraded community.

We need hardly appeal, in proof of this assertion, to the records of the effects of missionary enterprise. You are all aware, that, in many instances, a great change has been wrought, by the labours of faithful and self-denying men, on the savage clans amongst which they have settled. We omit, for the present, the incalculable advantages consequent on the introduction of Christianity, when another state of being

is brought into the account. We consider men simply with respect to their sojourning upon earth ; and we contend that the revolution, effected in temporal affairs, should win, even from those who prize not its disclosures in regard to eternal, the warmest admiration for the Bible. There has succeeded to lawlessness and violence the beautiful scenery of good order and peace. The rude beings, wont to wander to and fro, alternately the prey and the scourge of neighbouring tribes, have settled down to the quiet occupations of industry ; and, gathering themselves into villages, and plying the businesses of handicraft or agriculture, have presented the aspect of a well-disciplined society in exchange for that of a roving and piratical horde. And when a district which has heretofore, both morally and physically, been little better than a desert, puts forth in all its outspread the tokens of a vigorous culture ; and the sabbath-bell summons from scattered cottages a smiling population, linked together by friendship, and happy in all the sweetnesses of domestic charities ; why, the infidel must be something less than a man, if, with all his contempt for the Bible as a revelation from God, he refuse to admire and esteem it as a noble engine for uplifting humanity from its deep degradation.

But we wish rather to draw off your thoughts from what the Bible has done for society at large, and to fix them on what it effects for individuals. It follows, of course, that, since society is the aggre-

gate of individuals, what the Bible does for the mass is mainly the sum of what it does separately for the units. An effect upon society pre-supposes an effect on its component members in their individual capacities; it being impossible that the whole should be changed except by the change of its parts.

Now we are persuaded that there is no book, by the perusal of which the mind is so much strengthened, and so much enlarged, as it is by the perusal of the Bible. We deal not yet with the case of the man who, being under the teachings of God's Spirit, has the truths of revelation opened up to him in their gigantic and overwhelming force. We shall come afterwards to the consideration of the circumstances of the converted: we confine ourselves for the present, to those of the unconverted. We require nothing but an admission of the truth of Scripture; so that he who reads its declarations and statements, receives them as he would those of a writer of acknowledged veracity. And what we contend is, that the study of the Bible, even when supposed without influence on the soul, is calculated, far more than any other study, to enlarge the mind, and strengthen the intellect. There is nothing so likely to elevate, and endow with new vigour, our faculties, as the bringing them into contact with stupendous truths, and the setting them to grasp and measure those truths. If the human mind grow dwarfish and enfeebled, it is, ordinarily, because left to deal with commonplace facts, and never sum-

moned to the effort of taking the span and altitude of broad and lofty disclosures. The understanding will gradually bring itself down to the dimensions of the matters with which alone it is familiarized, till, having long been habituated to contracting its powers, it shall well-nigh lose the ability of expanding them.

But if it be for the enlargement of the mind, and the strengthening of its faculties, that acquaintance should be made with ponderous and far-spreading truths, it must be clear that knowledge of the Bible outdoes all other knowledge in bringing round such result. We deny not that great effects may be wrought on the peasantry of a land, by that wondrous diffusion of general information which is now going forward through the instrumentality of the press. It is not possible that our penny magazines should be carrying to the workshop of the artisan, and the cottage of the labourer, an actual library of varied intelligence, without producing an universal outstretch of mind, whether for good, or whether for evil. But if a population could be made a Bible-reading population, we argue that it would be made a far more thinking, and a far more intelligent population, than it will ever become through the turning its attention on simplified sciences and abbreviated histories. If I desired to enlarge a man's mind, I should like to fasten it on the truth that God never had beginning, and never shall have end. I would set it to the receiving this truth, and to the grappling with it. I know that, in endeavouring to compre-

hend this truth, the mind will be quickly mastered ; and that, in attempting to push on to its boundary-lines, it will fall down, wearied with travel, and see infinity still stretching beyond it. But the effort will have been a grand mental discipline. And he who has looked at this discovery of God, as made to us by the word of inspiration, is likely to have come away from the contemplation with his faculties elevated, and, at the same time, humbled ; so that a vigour, allied in no degree with arrogance, will have been generated by the study of a Bible-truth ; and the man, whilst strengthening his mind by a mighty exercise, will have learned the hardest, and the most useful, of all lessons—that intellect is not omnipotent, and that the greatest wisdom may be, oftentimes, the knowing ourselves ignorant.

We are not, you will observe, referring to the Bible as containing the food of the soul, and as teaching man what he must learn, if he would not perish everlastingly. We are simply arguing, that the bringing men to study the Bible would be the going a vast deal further towards making them strong-minded, and intellectual, than the dispersing amongst them treatises on all the subjects which philosophy embraces. The Bible; whilst the only book for the soul, is the best book for the intellect. The sublimity of the topics of which it treats ; the dignified simplicity of its manner of handling them ; the nobleness of the mysteries which it developes ; the illumination which it throws on points the most interest-

ing to creatures conscious of immortality; all these conspire to bring round a result which we insist upon as actual and necessary, namely, that the man who should study the Bible, and not be benefited by it spiritually, would be benefited by it intellectually. We think that it may be reckoned amongst incredible things, that converse should be held with the first parents of our race; that man should stand on this creation whilst its beauty was unsullied, and then mark the retinue of destruction careering with a dominant step over its surface; that he should be admitted to intercourse with patriarchs and prophets, and move through scenes peopled with the majesties of the Eternal, and behold the Godhead himself coming down into humanity, and working out, in the mysterious coalition, the discomfiture of the powers of darkness—oh, we reckon it, we say, amongst incredible things, that all this should be permitted to a man—as it is permitted to every student of Scripture—and yet that he should not come back from the ennobling associations with a mind a hundred-fold more expanded, and a hundred-fold more elevated, than if he had given his time to the exploits of Cæsar, or poured forth his attention on the results of machinery.

We speak not thus in any disparagement of the present unparalleled efforts to make knowledge accessible to all classes of our community. We are far enough from under-rating such efforts; and we hold, unreservedly, that a vast and a beneficial effect

may be wrought amongst the poor through the well-applied agency of vigorous instruction. In the mind of many a peasant, whose every moment is bestowed on wringing from the soil a scanty subsistence, there slumber powers, which, had they been evolved by early discipline, would have elevated their possessor to the first rank of philosophers; and many a mechanic, who goes patiently the round of unvaried toil, is, unconsciously, the owner of faculties, which, nursed and expanded by education, would have enabled him to electrify senates, and to win that pre-eminence which men award to the majesty of genius. There arise occasions, when—peculiar circumstances aiding the development—the pent-up talent struggles loose from the trammels of pauperism; and the peasant and mechanic, through a sudden outbreak of mind, start forward to the places for which their intellect fits them. But ordinarily, the powers remain through life bound up and torpid; and he, therefore, forms but a contracted estimate of the amount of high mental endowment, who reckons by the proud marbles which cause the aisles of a cathedral to breathe the memory of departed greatness, and never thinks, when walking the village church-yard with its rude memorials of the fathers of the valley, that, possibly there sleeps beneath his feet one, who, if early taught, might have trode with a Newton's step the firmament, or swept with a Milton's hand the harpstrings. We make, then, every admission of the power which there is in cultivation to enlarge



and unfold the human understanding. We nothing question that mental capacities are equally distributed amongst different classes of society; and that, if it were not for the adventitious circumstances of birth, entailing the advantages of education, there would be sent out from the lower grades the same proportion as from the higher, of individuals distinguished by all the energies of talent.

And thus believing that efforts to disseminate knowledge may cause a general calling forth of the mental powers of our population, we have no other feeling but that of pleasure in the survey of these efforts. It is indeed possible—and of this we have our fears—that, by sending a throng of publications to the fireside of the cottager, you may draw him away from the Bible, which has heretofore been specially the poor man's book, and thus inflict upon him, as we think, an intellectual injury, full as well as a moral. But, in the argument now in hand, we only uphold the superiority of scriptural knowledge, as compared with any other, when the alone object proposed is that of developing and improving the thinking powers of mankind. And we reckon that a fine triumph might be won for Christianity, by the taking two illiterate individuals, and subjecting them to two different processes of mental discipline. Let the one be made familiar with what is styled general information: let the other be confined to what we call Bible information. And when, in each case, the process had gone on a fair portion of time, and you came

to inquire whose reasoning faculties had been most improved, whose mind had most grown and expanded itself, we are persuaded that the scriptural study would vastly carry it over the miscellaneous; and that the experiment would satisfactorily demonstrate, that no knowledge tells so much on the intellect of mankind as that which is furnished by the records of inspiration.

And if the grounds of this persuasion be demanded, we think them so self-evident as scarcely to require the being formally advanced. We say again, that if you keep out of sight the concern which man has in scriptural truths, regarding him as born for eternity, there is a grandeur about these truths, and a splendour, and a beauty, which must amaze and fascinate him, if he look not beyond the present era of existence. In all the wide range of sciences, what science is there comparable, in its sublimity and difficulty, to the science of God? In all the annals of human-kind, what history is there so curious, and so riveting, as that of the infancy of man, the cradling, so to speak, of the earth's population? Where will you find a lawgiver from whose edicts may be learned a nobler jurisprudence than is exhibited by the statute-book of Moses? Whence will you gather such vivid illustrations of the power of truth as are furnished by the march of Christianity, when apostles stood alone, and a whole world was against them? And if there be no book which treats of a loftier science, and none which contains a more interesting history,

and none which more thoroughly discloses the principles of right and the prowess of truth; why then, just so far as mental improvement can be proved dependent on acquaintance with scientific matters, or historical, or legal, or ethical, the Bible, beyond all other books, must be counted the grand engine for achieving that improvement: and we claim for the Holy Scriptures the illustrious distinction, that, containing whatsoever is needful for saving the soul, they present also whatsoever is best calculated for strengthening the intellect.

Now we have not carried on our argument to its utmost limit, though we have, perhaps, advanced enough for the illustration of our text. We might occupy your attention with the language, as we have done with the matter, of holy writ. It were easy to show you that there is no human composition presenting, in any thing of the same degree, the majesty of oratory, and the loveliness of poetry. So that if the debate were simply on the best means of improving the taste of an individual—others might commend to his attention the classic page, or bring forward the standard works of a nation's literature; but we, for our part, would chain him down to the study of Scripture; and we would tell him, that, if he would learn what is noble verse, he must hearken to Isaiah sweeping the chords to Jerusalem's glory, and if he would know what is powerful eloquence, he must stand by St. Paul pleading in bonds at Agrippa's tribunal.

It suits not our purpose to push further this inquiry. But we think it right to impress on you most earnestly the wonderful fact, that if all the books in the wide world were assembled together, the Bible would as much take the lead in disciplining the understanding, as in directing the soul. Living, as we do, in days when intellectual and scriptural are set down, practically, as opposite terms, and it seems admitted as an axiom that to civilize and christianize, to make men intelligent and to make men religious, are things which have no necessary, nor even possible connexion, it is well that we sometimes revert to the matter-of-fact: and whilst every stripling is boasting that a great enlargement of mind is coming on a nation, through the pouring into all its dwellings a tide of general information, it is right to uphold the forgotten position, that, in caring for man as an immortal being, God cared for him as an intellectual; and that, if the Bible were but read by our artizans and our peasantry, we should be surrounded by a far more enlightened and intelligent population than will appear on this land, when the school-master, with his countless magazines, shall have gone through it in its length and in its breadth.

But up to this point we have made no direct reference to those words of David which we brought forward as the subject of present discourse. Yet all our remarks have tended to their illustration. The Psalmist, addressing himself to his God, declares, "the entrance of thy words giveth light, it giveth

understanding to the simple." Now you will at once perceive, that, when taken in its largest signification, this verse ascribes to the Bible precisely that energy for which we have contended. The assertion is, that the entrance of God's word gives light, and that it gives also understanding to the simple; whilst it has been our endeavour to show that a mind, dark through want of instruction, or weak through its powers being either naturally poor, or long unexercised, would become either illuminated, or strengthened, through acquaintance with the contents of Scripture. We thus vindicate the truth of our text, when religion, properly and strictly so called, is not brought into the account. We prove that the study of the Bible, when it does not terminate in the conversion of the soul, will terminate in the clearing and improvement of the intellect. So that you cannot find the sense wherein it does not hold good, that "the entrance of God's words giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple."

But we now go on to observe, that the passage applies with a vastly greater force to the converted than to the unconverted. We will employ the remainder of our time in examining its truth, when the student of scripture is supposed also the subject of grace. It would seem as though this case were specially contemplated by the Psalmist, there being something in the phraseology which loses otherwise much of its point. The expression "the entrance of thy words," appears to denote more than the simple perusal. The light breaks out, and the understand-

ing is communicated, not through the mere reading of thy words, but through "the entrance of thy words;" the Bible being effective, only as its truths pierce, and go deeper than the surface. And although it must be readily conceded that the mere reading, apart from the entrance of the word, can effect none of those results which we have already ascribed to the Bible, we still think the chief reference must be to an entrance into the soul, which is peculiar, rather than to that into the understanding, which is common. We may also remark, that the marginal reading of the passage is, "the opening of thy words giveth light." If we adopt this translation, which is, probably, the more accurate of the two, we must conclude that the Psalmist speaks of the word as interpreted by God's Spirit, and not merely as perused by the student. It is not the word, the bare letter which gives the light, and the understanding, specially intended; but the word, as opened, or applied by the Spirit. Now, in treating the text in this its more limited signification, we have to do, first, with a fact, and secondly, with the reasons of that fact. The fact is, that, on conversion, there is given to man an increased measure of understanding. The reasons of this fact are to be looked for in another fact, namely, that conversion results from the entrance, or opening, of God's word. It will be for our profit that we consider attentively both the fact and the reasons. And, first, as to the fact, that, on

becoming a man of godliness, the simple becomes increasingly a man of understanding.

Now it is, we believe, commonly observed, by those who set themselves to examine the effects of religion upon different characters, that a general strengthening of the mind is amongst the usual accompaniments of piety. The instances, indeed, are of no rare occurrence in which a mental weakness, bordering almost on imbecility, has been succeeded by no inconsiderable soundness and strength of understanding. The case has come within our own knowledge of an individual, who, before conversion, was accounted, to say the least, of very limited capacities, but who, after conversion, displayed such power of comprehending difficult truths, and such facility in stating them to others, that men of staunch and well-informed minds sought intercourse as a privilege. Something of the same kind has frequently been observed in regard to children. The grace of God has fallen, like the warm sun of the East, on their mental faculties; and, ripening them into the richness of the summer, whilst the body had as yet not passed through its spring-time, has caused that grey-hairs might be instructed by the tender disciple, and brought a neighbourhood round a death-bed to learn wisdom from the lips of a youth. And, without confining ourselves to instances which may be reckoned peculiar and extraordinary, we would assert that, in all cases, a marked change passes over the human

mind, when the heart is renewed by the influences of God's Spirit. We are not guilty of the absurdity of maintaining that there are supernaturally communicated any of those stores of information, which are ordinarily gained by a patient and pains-taking application. A man will not become more of an astronomer than he was before, nor more of a chemist, nor more of a linguist. He will have no greater stock of knowledge than he before possessed of subjects which most occupy the learned of his fellows. And if he would inform himself in such subjects, the man of religion must give himself to the same labour as the man of no religion, and sit down, with the same industry, to the treatise and the grammar. The peasant, who becomes not the philosopher simply because his mental powers have been undisciplined, will not leave the plough for the orrery, because his understanding is expanded by religion. Education might give, whilst religion will not give, the powers the philosophical bent. But there is a wide difference between the strengthening the mind, and the storing it with information. We may plead for the former effect without at all supposing the latter: though we shall come afterwards to see that information of the loftiest description is conveyed through the opening of the Bible, and that, consequently, if the impartment of knowledge be an improving thing to the faculties, an improvement, the most marked, must result from conversion. But we confine ourselves, at present, to the statement of



a fact. We assert that, in all cases, a man is intellectually, as well as spiritually, advantaged through becoming a man of piety. He will have a clearer and less-biassed judgment. His views will be wider, his estimates more correct. His understanding, having been exercised on truths the most stupendous, will be more competent for the examination of what is difficult or obscure. His reason, having learned that much lies beyond her province, as well as much within, will give herself to inquiries with greater humility and greater caution, and therefore, almost to a moral certainty, with greater success. And though we may thus seem rather to account for the fact than to prove it, let it be remembered that this fact being an effect, can only be established, either by pointing out causes, or by appealing to experience. The appeal to experience is, perhaps, the correcter mode of the two. And we, therefore, content ourselves with saying, that those who have watched character most narrowly will bear out the statement, that the opening of God's word is followed, ordinarily, by a surprising opening of man's faculties. If you take the rude and illiterate labourer, you will find that conversion proves to him a sort of intellectual as well as a moral renovation. There shall generally be no ploughman in the village who is so sound, and shrewd, and clear-headed a man, as the one who is most attentive to the salvation of his soul. And if an individual have heretofore been obtuse and unintelligent, let him be converted, and

there shall hereafter be commonly a quickness and animation ; so that religion, whose prime business it is to shed light upon the heart, shall appear, at the same time, to have thrown fire into the eye. We do not, indeed, assert that genius and talent are imparted with the new heart. But that it is amongst the characteristics of godliness, that it elevates man in the scale of intellectual being ; that it makes him a more thinking, and a more inquiring, and a more discriminating creature ; that it both rectifies and strengthens the mental vision ; we are guilty of no exaggeration, if we contend for this as universally true ; and this, if not more than this, is asserted in the statement, that “ the entrance of God’s words giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple.”

But we are now, in the second place, to consider certain of the reasons of this fact. What is there in the entrance, or, more strictly, in the opening, of God’s words, which may fairly account for so singular a result ? We begin by reminding you that the entrance, or opening of God’s word, denotes the application of scriptural truth to the heart and conscience by that Almighty agent, the Holy Ghost. Hence a saving, influential, belief in the disclosures of revelation is the distinguishing property of the individuals referred to in our text. And in enquiring, therefore, how it comes to pass that understanding is given to the simple, we are to proceed on the supposition, that he is endowed with real faith in those mighty truths which inspired writers were commis-

sioned to make known. Thus the question before us is reduced to this—what connexion subsists between believing in the heart the words of God, and having the understanding enlightened and strengthened?

Now our great difficulty is, not in finding an answer to this question, but in arranging and condensing our material of reply. We would, first, remind you that the truths, which have been commended to the belief, are the most sublime and spirit-stirring of all that can engage the attention of mankind. They are the truths of eternity, and their dimensions correspond with their duration. And we feel that there must be an amazing demand upon the mind, when, after long years of confinement to the petty affairs of this perishing state, it is summoned to the survey of those unmeasured wonders which crowd the platform of the future. I take a man whose attention has been engrossed by commerce, and whose thoughts have been given wholly to the schemings and workings of trade. May we not affirm, that, when the grace of God takes possession of this man's soul, there will occur an extraordinary mental revolution, and that, too, brought round by the magnificence of the subjects with which his spirit has newly grown conversant? In place of oceans which can be fathomed, and weighed, and measured, there is an expanse before him without a shore. In place of carrying on intercourse with none but the beings of his own race, separated

from him by a few leagues of distance, he sends his vessels, as it were, to lands tenanted by the creatures of a more glorious intelligence, and they return to him freighted with a produce costlier, and brighter, than earthly merchandise. In place of acquaintance with no ledger, save the one in which he casts up the debtor and creditor of a few fellow-worms, there rises before him the vast volume of dooms-day, and his gazings are often on the final balance-sheet of the human population. And we simply demand whether you think it possible, that there should be this overpowering accession to the objects which occupy the mind, and yet that the mind itself should not grow, and enlarge, and strengthen? The mind which deals with both worlds cannot, in the nature of things, be so contracted as that which deals only with one. Can that be a large understanding which is conversant with nothing but the scenery of a finite existence; or, rather, if heretofore the understanding have grasped nothing but the facts of an hour and a league, and these have appeared to crowd it to the full, must there not have taken place a scarcely measurable enlargement, if eternity and infinity be now gathered within its spreadings? Besides, there will be a sounder and more correct judgment upon events and probabilities, when reference is always made to the first cause, than when regard is had only to second causes. There will be a fairer and more honest deliberation, when the passions are under the sway of divine promises and threatenings,

than when there is no higher restraint than the ill-defined ones of human honour. So that it would seem altogether to be expected, that on the mere account of the might and vastness of the truths, into acquaintance with which the mind is introduced, the mind itself will send forth latent and unsuspected powers, or even shoot up into a new stature which shall put to shame its former dwarfishness. Thus the opening of God's words is accompanied, or followed, by the rousing up of dormant energies. The sphere, which the sand-grain seemed to fill, is required to dilate and take in immensity. The arm which plucked a leaf, or lifted a pebble, must strive to wrench up the oak, and raise the mountain. And in striving it strengthens. The mind, employed on what is great, becomes itself greater: busied with what is bright, it becomes itself brighter. Let the man, therefore, have been even of weak mental capacity—conversion will give something of nerve and tone to that capacity. Besides, it is a thing worthy your remark, and so obvious as scarcely to be overlooked, that all love, except the love of God, reduces and contracts the soul. If a man be a covetous man, fastening the might of his affections upon money, you will ordinarily find him, in every respect, a narrow-minded being. His intellect, whatever its natural capacities, will embrace little or nothing beyond modes of accumulation, and will grow practically unable to overpass the circles of profit and loss. It is just the same, if a man's love be fixed on repu-

tation. We hold it impossible there should be enlarged views, when those views centre in one's-self. There may be lofty and far-spreading schemes: for ambition can look upon a world, and think it too small for its marchings. But so long as those schemes are schemes for the aggrandizement of self, they may take a creation for their sphere, and yet require to be described as pitiful and niggardly. It is no mark of an ample mind that it can be filled with an unit. And many a philanthropist, labouring quietly and unobtrusively for the well-being of a solitary parish, or neighbourhood, has thereby proved himself a larger-hearted and a larger-souled creature, than an Alexander boundless in his graspings; and that, too, upon the clear and straightforward principle, that a heart which holds only one's-self, is a narrower and more circumscribed thing than another which contains a multitude of our fellows. The truth is, that all objects of love, except God, are smaller than the heart itself. They can only fill the heart, through the heart being contracted and narrowed. The human soul was framed, in its first creation, to that wideness as to be capable of enjoying God, though not of fully comprehending Him. And it still retains so much of its glorious original, that "all other things gather it in and straiten it from its natural size<sup>1</sup>." Whereas the love of God not only occupies it to the full, but inasmuch as in its broadest en-

<sup>1</sup> Leighton.

largement it is still infinitely too narrow for God, this love, as it were, does stretch and expand it, enabling it to hold more, and giving it, at the same time, more to hold. Thus, since the converted man loves God, and this new object of love demands amplitude of dwelling, we contend that, as a consequence on conversion, there will be extension of the whole mental apparatus. And if you find the man hereafter, as we are bold to say you will find him, exercising a correcter judgment, and displaying a shrewder sense, than had beforetime seemed in his possession, you have only to advance, in explanation of the phenomenon, that "the entrance of God's words giveth understanding to the simple."

But we may state yet more strongly, and also multiply our reasons, why, on becoming religious, the simple man should become more a man of understanding. Let it just be considered that man, whilst left in a state of natural corruption, is a being, in every respect, disorganised. Under no point of view is he the creature that he was, as fashioned, originally, after the image of his Maker. He can no longer act out any of the great ends of his creation; a total disability of loving and obeying the Almighty having been fastened on him by his forefather's apostasy. And when this degraded and ruined being is subjected to the saving operations of the Spirit of God, he is said to be renewed, or remodelled, after the long-lost resemblance. The conscience becomes disquieted; and this is conviction. The heart and its

affections are given back to God ; and this is conversion. Now we do not say, that, by this great moral renovation, the injuries which the fall caused to the human intellect are necessarily repaired. Nevertheless, we shall assert that the moral improvement is just calculated to bring about an intellectual. You all know how intimately mind and body are associated. One plays wonderfully on the other, so that disease of body may often be traced to gloom of mind, and, conversely, gloom of mind be proved to originate in disease of body. And if there be this close connexion between mental and corporeal, shall we suppose there is none between mental and moral? On the contrary, it is clear that the association, as before hinted, is of the strictest. What an influence do the passions exercise upon the judgment ! How is the voice of reason drowned in the cry of impetuous desires ! To what absurdities will the understanding give assent, when the will has resolved to take up their advocacy ! How little way can truth make with the intellect, when there is something in its character which opposes the inclination ! And what do we infer from these undeniable facts? Simply, that whilst the moral functions are disordered, so likewise must be the mental. Simply, that so long as the heart is depraved and disturbed, the mind, in a certain degree, must itself be out of joint. And if you would give the mind fair play, there must be applied straightway a corrective process to the heart. You cannot tell what a man's



understanding is, so long as he continues "dead in trespasses and sins<sup>1</sup>." There is a mountain upon it. It is tyrannized over by lusts, and passions, and affections, and appetites. It is compelled to form wrong estimates, and to arrive at wrong conclusions. It is not allowed to receive as truth what the carnal nature has an interest in rejecting as falsehood. And what hope then is there that the intellect will show itself what it actually is? It may be gigantic, when it seems only puny; respectable, when it passes for despicable. And thus we bring you back again to the argument in hand. We prove to you, that a weak mind may be so connected with a wicked heart, that to act on the wickedness would be going far towards acting on the weakness. Oh, fatal downfall of man's first parent—the image could not be shivered in its moral features, and remain untouched in its intellectual. Well has it been said, that possibly "Athens was but the rudiments of Paradise, and an Aristotle only the rubbish of Adam<sup>2</sup>." But if there be a moral renovation, there will, from the connexion now traced, be also, to a certain extent, an intellectual. And hence, since at the entrance of God's words the man is renewed in holiness, we have a right to expect that he will also be renewed in understanding. If additional mental capacity be not given, what he before possessed is allowed to develop itself; and this is practically the same as

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. South.

though there were a fresh gift. If he receive not actually a greater measure of understanding, still, inasmuch as the stern embargo which the heart laid on the intellect is mercifully removed, he is, virtually, under the same circumstances as if a new portion were bestowed. Thus, with all the precision which can fairly be required in the interpretation of such a phrase, we prove that, since man is elevated in the scale of intelligence through being raised from his moral degradation, we are bound to conclude with the Psalmist, that "the entrance of God's words giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple."

We have yet one more reason to advance, explanatory of the connexion which we set ourselves to trace. You observe that the entrance, or the opening, of God's words denotes such an application to the soul of the truths of revelation that they become influential on the life and conversation. Now, why should a man who lives by the Bible be, practically, possessed of a stronger and clearer understanding than, apparently, belonged to him ere this rule was adopted? The answer may be found in the facts, that it is a believer's duty, whensoever he lacks wisdom, to ask it of God, and a believer's privilege, never to be sent empty away. In all those cases which require the exercise of a sound discretion—which present opposite difficulties, rendering decision on a course painfully perplexing—who is likely to display the soundest judgment? the man who acts

for himself, or another who seeks, and obtains, direction from above? We plead not for rash and unfounded expectations of a divine interference on our behalf. We simply hold fast to the promises of Scripture. And we pronounce it to be beyond all peradventure, that, if the Bible be true, it is also true that they who have been translated from darkness to light are never left without the aids of God's Spirit, unless they seek not those aids, or seek them not earnestly and faithfully. If I have known the entrance or the opening of the word of our God, then I have practically learned such lessons as these: "lean not to thine own understanding;" "in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths<sup>1</sup>." And if I am not to lean to mine own understanding, and if I have the privilege of being directed by a higher than mine own, it is evident that I occupy, practically, the position of one to whom has been given an increased measure of understanding; and what, consequently, is to prevent the simple man, whose rule of life is God's word, from acting in all circumstances, whether ordinary or extraordinary, with such prudence, and discretion, and judgment, that he shall make good, to the very letter, the assertion, that "the entrance of God's words giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple?"

Now it is not possible to gather into a single dis-

<sup>1</sup> Prov. iii. 5, 6.

course the varied reasons which might be given for the fact under review. But the causes already adduced will serve to show, that the fact is, at least, by no means unaccountable; but that, on the contrary, the connexion is so necessary between spiritual improvement and intellectual, that amongst the accompaniments of a new heart we may justly reckon a clearer head.

We desire, in conclusion, to press upon you once more the worth of the Bible, and then to wind up our subject with a word of exhortation.

Of all the boons which God has bestowed on this apostate and orphaned creation, we are bound to say that the Bible is the noblest and most precious. We bring not into comparison with this illustrious donation the glorious sun-light, nor the rich sustenance which is poured forth from the storehouses of the earth, nor that existence itself which allows us, though dust, to soar into companionship with angels. The Bible is the development of man's immortality, the guide which informs him how he may move off triumphantly from a contracted and temporary scene, and grasp destinies of unbounded splendour, eternity his life-time and infinity his home. It is the record which tells us that this rebellious section of God's unlimited empire is not excluded from our Maker's compassions; but that the creatures who move upon its surface, though they have basely sepulchred in sinfulness and corruption the magnifi-

cence of their nature, are yet so dear in their ruin to him who first formed them, that he hath bowed down the heavens in order to open their graves. Oh, you have only to think what a change would pass on the aspect of our race, if the Bible were suddenly withdrawn, and all remembrance of it swept away, and you arrive at some faint notion of the worth of the volume. Take from Christendom the Bible, and you have taken the moral chart by which alone its population can be guided. Ignorant of the nature of God, and only guessing at their own immortality, the tens of thousands would be as mariners, tossed on a wide ocean, without a pole-star, and without a compass. It were to mantle the earth with a more than Egyptian darkness: it were to dry up the fountains of human happiness: it were to take the tides from our waters, and leave them stagnant, and the stars from our heavens, and leave them in sack-cloth, and the verdure from our valleys, and leave them in barrenness: it were to make the present all recklessness and the future all hopelessness—the maniac's revelry and then the fiend's imprisonment—if you could annihilate that precious volume, which tells us of God and of Christ, and unveils immortality, and instructs in duty, and woos to glory. Such is the Bible. Prize ye it, and study it more and more. Prize it, as ye are immortal beings—for it guides to the New Jerusalem. Prize it, as ye are intellectual beings—for it “giveth understanding to the simple.”

We have now only space for a brief word of exhortation, and we ask for it your closest attention. A minister, if he would be faithful to his calling, must mark the signs of the times, and endeavour so to shape his addresses that they may meet, and expose, the prominent errors. Now we think that, in our own day, there is a strong disposition to put aside the Bible, and to seek out other agency for accomplishing results which God hath appointed it to effect. We fear, for example, that the intellectual benefits of Scriptural knowledge are well-nigh entirely overlooked; and that, in the efforts to raise the standard of mind, there is little or no recognition of the mighty principle, that the Bible outweighs ten thousand Encyclopædias. And we are fearful on your account, lest something of this national substitution of human literature for divine should gain footing in your households. We fear lest, in the business of education, you should separate broadly that teaching which has to do with the salvation of the soul, from that which has to do with the improvement of the mind. We refer to this point, because we think ourselves bound, by the vows of our calling, to take every opportunity of stating the duties which devolve on you as parents or guardians. There is a sense in which it may be affirmed that souls, those mysterious and imperishable things, are given into the custody of every father of a family. And we are persuaded that if there be one thing on

this earth, which draws, more than another, the sorrowing regards of the world of spirits, it must be the system of education pursued by the generality of parents. The entering a room gracefully is a vast deal more attended to than the entering into heaven; and you would conclude that the grand thing for which God had sent the child into the world, was that it might catch the Italian accent, and be quite at home in every note of the gamut. Christianity, indeed, is not at variance with the elegances of life: she can use them as her handmaids, and give them a beauty of which, out of her service, they are utterly destitute. We wage no war, therefore, with accomplishments, any more than with the solid acquirements of a liberal education. We are only anxious to press on you the necessity that ye make religion the basis of your system. We admit, in all its breadth, the truth of the saying, that knowledge is power. It is power—ay, a fatal, and a perilous. Neither the might of armies, nor the scheming of politicians, avails any thing against this power. The school-master, as we have already hinted, is the grand engine for revolutionizing a world. Let knowledge be generally diffused, and the fear of God be kept in the back-ground, and you have done the same for a country as if you had laid the gunpowder under its every institution: there needs only the igniting of a match, and the land shall be strewed with the fragments of all that is glorious and venerable. But,

nevertheless, we would not have knowledge chained up in the college and monastery, because its arm is endowed with such sinew and nerve. We would not put forth a finger to uphold a system which we believed based on the ignorance of a population. We only desire to see knowledge of God advance as the vanguard of the host of information. We are sure that an intellectual must be a mighty peasantry. But we are equally sure that an intellectual, and a godless, will demonstrate their might, by the ease with which they crush whatever most adorns and elevates a kingdom. And in speaking to you individually of your duties as parents, we would bring into the family-circle the principles thus announced as applicable to the national. We want not to set bounds to the amount of knowledge which you strive to impart. But never let this remembrance be swept from your minds—that, to give a child knowledge without endeavouring, at the same time, to add to knowledge godliness, is to do your best to throw the momentum of the giant into the arm of the idiot; to construct a machinery which may help to move a world, and to leave out the spring which would ensure its moving it only towards God. We would have you shun, even as you would the tampering with an immortality deposited in your keeping, the imitating what goes on in a thousand of the households of a professedly Christian neighbourhood—the children can pronounce well, and they can step



well, and they can play well; the mother proudly exhibits the specimens of proficiency in painting, and the father dwells, with an air of delight, on the progress made in Virgil and Homer—but if you inquire how far these parents are providing for their own in the things of eternity, why, the children have perhaps learned the Church catechism, and they read a chapter occasionally on a Sunday afternoon. And that ye may avoid the mistake into which, as we think, the temper of the times is but too likely to lead you, we would have you learn, from the subject which has now been discussed, that, in educating your children for the next life, you best educate them for the present. We give it you, as a truth, made known to us by God, and, at the same time, demonstrable by reason, that, in going through the courses of Bible-instruction, there is better mental discipline, whether for a child or an adult, than in any of the cleverly devised methods for opening and strengthening the faculties. We say not that the study of Scripture should exclude other studies, or be substituted for them. Natural philosophy is not to be learned from Scripture, nor general history; and we would not have such matters neglected. But we say that Scriptural study should be, at once, the ground-work and companion of every other; and that the mind will advance, with the firmest and most dominant step, into the various departments of knowledge, when familiarized with the

truths of revelation, and accustomed to walk their unlimited spreadings. If parents had no higher ambition than to make their children intellectual, they would act most shrewdly by acting as though desirous to make them religious. It is thus we apply our subject to those amongst you who are parents or guardians. But it applies to all. We call upon you all to observe, that, in place of being beneath the notice of the intellectual, the Bible is the great nourisher of intellect. We require of you to bear away to your homes as an undeniable fact, that to care for the soul is to cultivate the mind. We will not yield the culture of the understanding to earthly husbandmen. There are heavenly ministers who water it with a choicer dew, and pour on it the beams of a more brilliant sun, and prune its branches with a kinder and more skilful hand. We will not give up reason to stand always as a priestess at the altars of human philosophy. She hath a more majestic temple to tread, and more beauteous robes wherein to walk, and incense rarer and more fragrant to burn in golden censers. She does well when exploring boldly God's visible works. She does better, when she meekly submits to spiritual teaching, and sits, as a child, at the Saviour's feet: for then shall she experience the truth, that "the entrance of God's words giveth light and understanding." And, therefore, be ye heedful—the young amongst you more especially—that ye be not

ashamed of piety, as though it argued a feeble capacity. Rather be assured, forasmuch as revelation is the great strengthener of reason, that the march of mind which leaves the Bible in the rear is an advance, like that of our first parents in Paradise, towards knowledge, but, at the same time, towards death.

## SERMON VIII.

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THE PROVISION MADE BY GOD FOR THE POOR.

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PSALM lxxviii. 10.

“Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.”

WE think it one of the most remarkable sayings of Holy Writ, that “the poor shall never cease out of the land<sup>1</sup>.” The words may be regarded as a prophecy, and their fulfilment has been every way most surprising. Amid all the revolutions whereof our earth has been the scene—revolutions which have presented to us empire after empire rising to the summit of greatness, and gathering into its provinces the wealth of the world—there has never been a nation over which riches have been equally diffused. The many have had poverty for their portion, whilst abundance has been poured into the laps of the few. And if you refuse to consider this as a divine appointment, it will be hard, we think, to account for the phenomenon. It might have been expected that the distribution of physical comfort would be pro-

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xv. 11.

portioned to the amount of physical strength; so that numbers would dictate to individuals; and the power of bone and muscle be brought to bear on the production of equality of circumstance. And just in the degree that we recognise the fulfilment of prophecy in the continuance of poverty, we must be prepared to allow, that the unequal distribution of temporal advantages is a result of the Almighty's good pleasure; and that, consequently, all popular harangues on equality of rights are nothing less than contradictions to the assertion, "The rich and poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all<sup>1</sup>."

There is no easier subject for stormy and factious declamation, than the hard and unnatural estate of poverty. The slightest reference to it engages, at once, the feelings of the multitude. And whenever a bold and talented demagogue works up into his speeches the doctrine, that all men are born with equal rights, he plies his audience with the strongest excitement, but does, at the same time, greatest despite to the word of inspiration. We hold it to be clear to every student of Scripture, that God hath ordained successive ranks in human society, and that uniformity of earthly allotment was never contemplated by his providence. And, therefore, do we likewise hold, that attempts at equalization would be tantamount to rebellion against the appointments of heaven; and that infidelity must up-

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxii. 2.

heave the altars of a land, ere its inhabitants could venture out on such enterprise. It is just that enterprise which may be looked for as the offspring of a doctrine, demonstrable only when the Bible shall have perished—the doctrine that all power emanates from the people. When a population have been nursed into the belief that sovereignty is theirs, the likelihood is, that the first assertion of this sovereignty will be the seizing the possessions of those who gave them the lesson. The readiest way of overturning the rights of property, is to introduce false theories on the origin of power. And they must, at the least, be short-sighted calculators, who, having taught our mechanics and labourers that they are the true king of the land, expect them to continue well-contented with the title, and quite willing that superiors should keep the advantages.

But our main concern lies, at present, with the fact, that poverty is an appointment of God. We assume this fact as one not to be questioned by a Christian congregation. And when we have fastened on the truth that God hath appointed poverty, we must set ourselves to ascertain that God hath not overlooked the poor; there being nothing upon which we may have a greater prior certainty than on this, namely, that if it be God's will that the poor should not cease, it must also be his arrangement that the poor should be cared for.

Now our text is a concise, but striking declaration that the solitudes of God are engaged on the

side of the poor. It would seem, indeed, from the context, that spiritual blessings were specially intended by the Psalmist, when addressing himself to God in the words to be examined. He speaks of the Almighty as sending a plentiful rain, and refreshing the weary inheritance. And we think it required by the nature of this imagery, as compared with the rest of scriptural metaphor, that we understand an outpouring of the Spirit as the mercy which David commemorates. But still there is nothing, either in the words themselves, or in those which accompany them, requiring that we circumscribe the bearings of the passage. We may take it as a general truth, that "Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." And we shall, therefore, endeavour to turn your thoughts on two separate inquiries; examining, in the first place, how the assertion holds good in temporal things, and, in the second place, how it holds good in spiritual things. This second inquiry is the more closely connected with the business of our Sabbath assemblings, and we shall give it, therefore, the main of our time and attention.

Now if we set ourselves to establish as a matter-of-fact, that, in temporal things, God, of his goodness has prepared for the poor, we seem, at once, arrested in our demonstration by that undeniable wretchedness which lies heavy on the mass of a crowded population. But it would be altogether wrong that we should judge any appointment of God, without reference being had to the distortions

which man has himself introduced. We feel assured upon the point, that, in constructing the framework of society, God designed that one class should depend greatly on another, and that some should have nothing but a hard-earned pittance, whilst others were charioted in plenty. But we are to the full as clear upon another point, namely, that if in any case there be positive destitution, it is not to be referred to the established ordinance of God, but only to some forgetfulness, or violation, of that mutual dependence which this ordinance would encourage. There has never yet been the state of things—and, in spite of the fears of political economists, we know not that there ever will be—in which the produce of this earth sufficed not for its population. God has given the globe for the dwelling-place of man, and, causing that its valleys stand thick with corn, scatters food over its surface to satisfy the wants of an enormous and multiplying tenantry. And unless you can show that he hath sent such excess of inhabitants into this district of his empire, that there cannot be wrung for them sufficiency of sustenance from the overtasked soil, you will have made no advance towards a demonstration, that the veriest outcast, worn to a mere skeleton by famine, disproves the assertion, that God, of his goodness, has prepared for the poor. The question is not whether every poor man obtains enough: for this brings into the account human management. It is simply, whether God has given enough: for this



limits our thoughts to divine appointment. And beyond all doubt, when we take this plain and straightforward view of the subject, we cannot put from us the conclusion, that God, of his goodness, has prepared for the poor. If he had so limited the productiveness of the earth that it would yield only enough for a fraction of its inhabitants; and if he had allowed that the storehouses of nature might be exhausted by the demands of the myriads whom he summoned into life; there would lie objections against a statement which ascribes to his goodness the having made an universal provision. But if—and we have here a point admitting not of controversy—he have always hitherto caused that the productions of the globe should keep pace with its population, it is nothing better than the reasoning of a child, that God hath not provided for the poor, because, through maladministration of his bounties, the poor may, in certain cases, have been wholly unprovided for.

And it is worth your while to observe, that God prepared more than mere sustenance for the poor, when he endowed the soil with its surprising, and still undeveloped productiveness. We are indebted to the ground on which we tread for the arts which adorn, and the learning which ennobles, as well as for the food which sustains human life. If God had thrown such barrenness into the earth, that it would yield only enough to support those who tilled it, you may all perceive that every man must have laboured

at agriculture for himself; there being no overplus of produce which the toil of one individual could have procured for another. Thus, if you examine with any carefulness, you must necessarily discover, that the sole reason why this company of men can devote themselves to the business of legislation, and that to the study of jurisprudence; why we may erect schools, and universities, and so set apart individuals who shall employ themselves on the instruction of their fellows; why we can have armies to defend the poor man's cottage and the rich man's palace, and navies to prosecute commerce, and preachers to stand up in our cities and villages, pointing mankind to Jesus of Nazareth—that the alone practical reason of all this must be sought in the fertility of the soil: for if the soil were not fertile enough to yield more than the tiller requires for himself, every man must be a husbandman, and none could follow any other avocation. So that, by an arrangement which appears the more wonderful the more it is pondered, God hath literally wrought into the soil of this globe a provision for the varied wants, physical, and moral, and intellectual, of the race whose generations possess successively its provinces. That which made wealth possible was equally a preparation for the well-being of poverty. And though you may trace, with a curious accuracy, the rise and progress of sciences; and map down the steps of the march of civilization; and show how, in the advancements of a nation, the talented and enter-

prising have carried on crusades against ignorance and barbarism; we can still bring you back to the dust out of which we were made, and bid you find in its particles the elements of the results on which your admiration is poured, and tie you down, with the rigour of a mathematical demonstration, to the marvellous, though half-forgotten, fact, that God invested the ground with the power of ministering to man's many necessities—so that the arts by which the comforts of a population are multiplied, and the laws by which their rights are upheld, and the schools in which their minds are disciplined, and the churches in which their souls are instructed—all these may be referred to one and the same grand ordinance; all ascribed to that fruitfulness of the earth by which God, “of his goodness, has prepared for the poor.”

But we said that we should dwell at no great length on the first division of our subject; and we now, therefore, pass on to investigate the second. We are to show how the assertion holds good in spiritual things, that God, of his goodness, has prepared for the poor.

Now we often set before you the noble doctrine of Scripture and our church, that Christ died for the whole world; and that, consequently, the human being can never be born whose sins were not laid on the surety of the apostate. It is a deep and mysterious, but glorious, truth, that the sins of every man were punished in Jesus, so that the guiltiness of

each individual pressed in upon the Mediator, and wrung out its penalties from his flesh and his spirit. The person of Christ Jesus was divine; whilst in that person were united two natures, the human and divine. And on this account it was that the sins of every man could rush against the surety, and take their penalty out of his anguish. It is not merely that Christ was the brother of every man. A man and his brother are walled-off, and separated, by their personality. What is done by the one cannot be felt, as his own action, by the other. But Christ, by assuming our nature, took, as it were, a part of every man. He was not, as any one of us is, a mere human individual. But having human nature, and not human personality, he was tied, so to speak, by a most sensitive fibre, to each member of the enormous family of man. And along these unnumbered threads of sympathy there came travelling the evil deeds, and the evil thoughts, and the evil words, of every child of a rebellious seed; and they knocked at his heart, and asked for vengeance: and thus the sin became his own in every thing but its guiltiness; and the wondrous result was brought round, that he "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth<sup>1</sup>," felt every sin which can ever be committed, and was pierced by it, and torn by it: and the alone innocent one—the solitary undefiled and unprofaned man—he was so bound up with each rebel against

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 22.

God, that the rebellion, in all its ramifications, seemed to throw itself into his heart; and, convulsing where it could not contaminate, dislocated the soul which it did not defile, and caused the thorough endurance of all the wretchedness, and all the anguish, which were due to the transgressions of a mighty population. Aye, and it is because I can clearly perceive, that, in taking human nature, Christ fastened me to himself by one of those sympathetic threads which can never be snapped, that I feel certified that every sin which I have committed, and every sin which I shall yet commit, went in upon the Mediator and swelled his sufferings. When he died, my sins, indeed, had not been perpetrated. Yet, forasmuch as they were to be perpetrated in the nature which he had taken to himself, they came crowding up from the unborn ages; and they ran, like molten lead, along the fibre which, even then, bound me to the Saviour; and pouring themselves into the sanctuary of his righteous soul, contributed to the wringing from him the mysterious cry, "mine iniquities"—mine, done in that nature which is emphatically mine—"mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me<sup>1</sup>."

Now it was thus with a distinct and specific reference to every individual, the poorest and the meanest of our race, that "the Word was made flesh<sup>2</sup>," and

<sup>1</sup> Psalm xl. 12.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 14.

dwelt and died upon this earth. It was not merely that God cared for the world in the mass, as for a province of his empire tenanted by the wayward and the wretched. He cared for each single descendant of Adam. We know, with an assurance which it is beyond the power of argument to shake, that Christ Jesus tasted death for every man. We are commissioned to say to each individual—it matters not who he be, scorched by an eastern sun, or girt in by polar snows—the Son of the Eternal died for thee, for thee separately, for thee individually. And if, then, you cannot find us the outcast unredeemed by the costly processes of the incarnation and crucifixion; if, addressing ourselves to the least known, and the most insignificant, of our species, we can tell him that, though he be but an unit, yea, almost a cypher, in the vast sum of human existence, he has so engaged the solitudes of the Almighty that a divine person undertook his suretyship, and threw down the barriers which sin had cast up between him and happiness—oh, have we not an overpowering proof, that God has been mindful of the despised ones and the destitute; and whilst we can appeal to such provision on behalf of the poor as places heaven within their reach, in all its magnificence, and in all its blessedness, where is the tongue that can presume to deny, that God hath, “of his goodness, prepared for the poor?”

But we cannot content ourselves with this general proof. It seems implied in our text—and this is the

point which we seek to establish—that, in spiritual things, God has prepared for the poor even more than for the rich. We proceed, then, to observe, that God has so manifested a tender and impartial concern for his creatures, as to have thrown advantages round poverty which may well be said to counterbalance its disadvantages. It is unquestionable that the condition of a poor man is more favourable than that of a rich to the reception of Christ. Had not this been matter-of-fact, the Redeemer would never have pronounced it “easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven<sup>1</sup>.” There is in poverty what we may almost call a natural tendency to the leading men to dependence on God, and faith in his promises. On the other hand, there is in wealth just as natural a tendency to the production of a spirit of haughty and infidel independence. The poor man, harassed with difficulties in earning a scanty subsistence for himself and his household, will have a readier ear for tidings of a bright home beyond the grave, than the rich man, who, lapped in luxury, can imagine nothing more delightful than the unbroken continuance of present enjoyments. Poverty, in short, is a humiliating and depressing thing; whilst affluence nurtures pride and elation of mind. And in proportion, therefore, as all which has kinship with humility is favourable to piety, all

<sup>1</sup> Luke xviii. 25.

which has kinsmanship with haughtiness unfavourable, we may fairly argue that the poor man has an advantage over the rich, considering them both as appointed to immortality.

But not only has God thus mercifully introduced a kind of natural counterpoise to the allowed evils of poverty : in the institution of a method of redemption, he may specially be said to have prepared for the mean and the destitute. There is nothing in the prescribed duties of religion, which, in the least degree, requires that a man should be a man of learning or leisure. We take the husbandman at his plough, or the manufacturer at his loom ; and we can tell him, that, whilst he goes on uninterruptedly with his daily toil, the grand business of his soul's salvation may advance with an uniform march. We do not require that he should relax in his industry, or abstract some hours from usual occupations, in order to learn a complicated plan, and study a scheme which demands time and intellect for its mastery. The Gospel message is so exquisitely simple, the sum and substance of truth may be so gathered into brief and easily-understood sentences, that all which it is absolutely necessary to know may be told in a minute, and borne about with him by the labourer in the field, or the mariner on the waters, or the soldier on the battle-plain. We reckon it far the most wonderful feature in the Bible, that, whilst presenting a sphere for the longest and most pains-taking research—exhibiting heights which no soarings of imagina-



tion can scale, and depths which no fathoming-line of intellect can explore—it sets forth the way of salvation with so much of unadorned plainness, that it may as readily be understood by the child or the peasant, as by the full-grown man or the deep-read philosopher. Who will keep back the tribute of acknowledgment that God, of his goodness, has prepared for the poor? If an individual be possessed of commanding genius, gifted with powers which far remove him from the herd of his fellows, he will find in the pages of Scripture, beauties, and difficulties, and secrets, and wonders, which a long life-time of study shall leave unexhausted. But the man of no pretensions to talent, and of no opportunities for research, may turn to the Bible in quest of comfort and direction; and there he will find traced as with a sun-beam, so that none but the wilfully blind can overlook the record, guidance for the lost, and consolation for the downcast. We say that it is in this preparation for the poor, that the word of God is most surprising. View the matter how you will, the Bible is as much the unlearned man's book as it is the learned, as much the poor man's as it is the rich. It is so composed as to suit all ages and all classes. And whilst the man of learning and capacity is poring upon the volume in the retirement of his closet, and employing all the stores of a varied literature on the illustrating its obscurities and the solving its difficulties, the labourer may be sitting at his cottage-door, with his boys and his girls drawn round

him, explaining to them, from the simply-written pages, how great is the Almighty, and how precious is Jesus. Nay, we shall not overstep the boundaries of truth, if we carry these statements yet a little further. We hold that the Bible is even more the poor man's book than the rich man's. There is a vast deal of the Bible which appears written with the express design of verifying our text, that God, of his goodness, has "prepared for the poor." There are many of the promises which seem to demand poverty as the element wherein alone their full lustre can radiate. The prejudices, moreover, of the poor man against the truths which the volume opens up are likely to be less strong, and inveterate, than those of the rich man. He seems to have, naturally, a kind of companionship with a suffering Redeemer, who had not "where to lay his head<sup>1</sup>." He can have no repugnance, but, on the contrary, a sort of instinctive attachment, to apostles who, like himself, wrought with their own hands for the supply of daily necessities. He can feel himself, if we may use such expression, at home in the scenery, and amongst the leading characters of the New Testament. Whereas, on the other hand, the scientific man, and the man of education, and of influence, and of high bearing in society, will have prepossessions, and habits of thinking, with which the announcements of the Gospel will unavoidably jar. He has, as it were, to be

<sup>1</sup> Luke viii. 58.

brought down to the level of the poor man, before he can pass under the gateway which stands at the outset of the path of salvation. He has to begin by learning the comparative worthlessness of many distinctions, which, never having been placed within the poor man's reach, stand not as obstacles to his heavenward progress. And if there be correctness in this representation, it is quite evident that if the Gospel be, for the first time, put into the hands, or proclaimed in the hearing, of a man of rank and of a mean man, the likelihood is far greater that the mean man will lay hold, effectively and savingly, on the truth, than that the man of rank will thus grasp it: and our conclusion, therefore, comes out strong and irresistible, that, if there be advantage on either side, the Bible is even more nicely adapted to the poor than to the rich; and that, consequently, it is most emphatically true, that, "thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor."

But there is yet another point on which we think it well to turn briefly your attention; for it is one which is, oftentimes, not a little misunderstood. We know that what are termed the evidences of Christianity are of a costly and intricate description, scarcely accessible except to the studious. It is hardly to be supposed that the unlettered man can have mastered the external arguments which go to prove the divine origin of our faith. And if the Almighty have placed the witness for the truth of Christianity beyond the poor man's grasp, has he not left the

poor man open to the inroads of scepticism ; and how, therefore, can it be said that he has of his goodness "prepared for the poor?" There is much in the aspect of the times which gives powerful interest to such a question as this. Whilst all ranks are assailed by the emissaries of infidelity, it is important that we see whether God has not prepared for all ranks some engines of resistance.

Now we are never afraid of subjecting the external evidences of Christianity to the most sifting processes which our adversaries can invent. We do not receive a religion without proof ; and our proof we will bring to the best touchstones of truth. Christianity is not the grave, but the field of vigorous inquiry. And we see not, therefore, why scepticism should claim to itself a monopoly of intellect. The high-road to reputation for talent seems to be boldness in denying Christianity. Aye, and many a young man passes now-a-days for a fine and original genius, who could not distinguish himself in the honourable competitions of an university, who makes no way in his profession, and is nothing better than a cipher in society ; but who is of so independent a spirit, that he can jeer at priestcraft in a club-room, and of so inventive a turn that he can ply Scripture with objections a hundred times refuted.

But the evidences of Christianity are not to be set aside by a sneer. We will take our stand as on a mount thrown up in the broad waste of many generations ; and one century after another

shall struggle forth from the sepulchres of the past; and each, as its monarchs, and its warriors, and its priests, walk dimly under review, shall lay down a tribute at the feet of Christianity. We will have the volume of history spread out before us, and bid science arrange her manifold developments, and seek the bones of martyrs in the east and in the west, and tread upon battle-plains with an empire's dust sepulchred beneath; but on whatsoever we gaze, and whithersoever we turn, the evidences of our religion shall look nobler, and wax mightier. It were the work of a lifetime to gain even cursory acquaintance with the proofs which substantiate the claims of Christianity. It would beat down the energies of the most gifted and masterful spirit, to require it to search out, and concentrate, whatsoever attests the truth of the Gospel—for the mountains of the earth have a voice, and the cities, and the valleys, and the tombs; and the sail must be unfurled to bear the inquirer over every ocean, and the wings of the morning must carry him to the outskirts of infinite space. We will not concede that a more overwhelming demonstration would be given to the man who should stand side by side with a messenger from the invisible world, and hear from celestial lips the spirit-stirring news of redemption, and be assured of the reality of the interview by a fiery cross left stamped on his forehead, than is actually to be attained by him who sits down patiently and assiduously, and plies, with all the

diligence of an unwearied labourer in the mine of information, at accumulating and arranging the evidences of Christianity. So that we may well think ourselves warranted in contending that God has marvellously prepared for the faith of educated men. Scepticism, whatever its boasts, walks to its conclusions over a fettered reason, and a forgotten creation. And any man who will study carefully, and think candidly, shall rise from his inquiry a believer in revelation.

But what say we to the case of the poor man? How hath God, of his goodness, "prepared for the poor?" It may be certain that the external evidences of Christianity amount to a demonstration, which, when fairly put, is altogether irresistible. But it is just as certain that the generality of believers can have little, or no acquaintance with these evidences. It were virtually the laying an interdict on the Christianity of the lower orders, to establish a necessity, that mastery of the evidences must precede belief in the doctrines of the Gospel. We can see no result but that of limiting the very existence of religion to the academy or the cloister, and prohibiting its circulation through the dense masses of our population, if the only method of certifying one's-self that the Bible is from God were that of searching through the annals of antiquity, and following out the testimony arranged by the labours of successive generations. And yet, on the other hand, it were just as fatal to the Christianity of our

peasantry, to maintain that they take for granted the divine origin of the Gospel, and that they can give no better reason than that of long-established custom, why the Bible should be received as a communication from heaven. We say that this would be as fatal as the former supposition to the Christianity of our peasantry. A belief which has nothing to rest on, deserves not to be designated belief; and, unable to sustain itself by reason, must yield at the first onset of scepticism.

But there can be nothing more unjust than the conclusion, that the poor man has no evidence within reach, because he has not the external. We will not allow that God has failed, in this respect, to prepare for the poor. We will go into the cottage of the poor disciple of Christ, and we will say to him, why do you believe upon Jesus? You know little or nothing about the witness of antiquity. You know little or nothing about the completion of prophecy. You can give me no logical, no grammatical, no historical, reasons for concluding the Bible to be, what it professes itself, a revelation, made in early times, of the will of the Almighty. Why then do you believe upon Jesus? What grounds have you for faith, what basis of conviction?

Now if the poor man lay bare his experience, he will, probably, show how God hath prepared for him, by giving such a reply as the following. I lived long unconcerned about the soul. I thought only on the pleasures of to-day: I cared nothing

for the worm which might gnaw me to-morrow. I was brought, however, by sickness, or by disappointment, or by the death of the one I best loved, or by a startling sermon, to fear that all was not right between me and God. I grew more and more anxious. Terrors haunted me by day, and sleep went from my pillow by night. At length I was bidden to look unto Jesus as "delivered for my offences, and raised again for my justification<sup>1</sup>." Instantly I felt him to be exactly the Saviour that I needed. Every want found in him an immediate supply; every fear a cordial; every wound a balm. And ever since, the more I have read of the Bible, the more have I found that it must have been written on purpose for myself. It seems to know all my cares, all my temptations; and it speaks so beautifully a word in season, that he who wrote it must, I think, have had me in his eye. Why do I believe on Jesus? Oh, I feel him to be a divine Saviour—that is my proof. Why do I believe the Bible? I have found it to be God's word—there is my witness.

We think, assuredly, that if you take the experience of the generality of Christians, you will find that they do not believe without proof. We again say that we cannot assent to the proposition, that the Christianity of our villages and hamlets takes for granted the truth of the Bible, and has

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 25.



no reason to give when that truth is called in question. The peasant who, when the hard toil of the day is concluded, will sit by his fireside, and read the Bible, with all the eagerness, and all the confidence of one who receives it as a message from God, has some better ground than common report, or the tradition of his forefathers, on which to rest his persuasion of the divinity of the volume. The book speaks to him with a force, which, he feels, never could belong to a mere human composition. There is drawn such a picture of his own heart—a picture presenting many features which he would not have discovered, had they not been thus outlined, but which he recognizes as most accurate, the instant they are exhibited—that he can be sure that the painter is none other but He who alone searches the heart. The proposed deliverance agrees so wonderfully, and so minutely, with his wants; it manifests such unbounded and equal concern for the honour of God, and the well-being of man; it provides with so consummate a skill, that, whilst the human race is redeemed, the divine attributes shall be glorified; that it were like telling him that a creature spread out the firmament, and inlaid it with worlds, to tell him that the proffered salvation is the device of impostors, or the figment of enthusiasts. And thus the pious inmate of the workshop or the cottage “hath the witness in himself<sup>1</sup>.” The home-thrusts which he receives from

<sup>1</sup> 1 John v. 10.

“the sword of the Spirit<sup>1</sup>” are his evidences that the weapon is not of earthly manufacture. The surprising manner in which texts will start, as it were, from the page, and become spoken things rather than written; so that the Bible, shaking itself from the trammels of the printing-press, seems to rush from the firmament in the breathings of the Omnipotent—this stamps Scripture to him as literally God’s word—prophets and apostles may have written it, but the Almighty still utters it. And all this makes the evidence with which the poor man is prepared in defence of Christianity. We do not represent it as an evidence which may successfully be brought forward in professed combat with infidelity. It must have been experienced before it can be admitted; and not being of a nature to commend itself distinctly to the understanding of the sceptic, will be rejected by him as visionary, and, therefore, received not in proof. But, if the self-evidencing power of Scripture render not the peasant a match for the unbeliever, it nobly secures him against being himself overborne. “The witness in himself,” if it qualify him not, like science and scholarship, for the offensive, will render him quite impregnable, so long as he stands on the defensive. And we believe of many a village Christian, who has never read a line on the evidences of Christianity, and whose whole theology is drawn from the Bible itself, that he would be, to the full, as staunch in

<sup>1</sup> Eph. vi. 17.

withstanding the emissaries of scepticism as the mightiest and best-equipped of our learned divines ; and that, if he could give no answer to his assailant whilst urging his chronological and historical objections, yet by falling back on his own experience, and entrenching himself within the manifestations of truth which have been made to his own conscience, he would escape the giving harbourage, for one instant, to a suspicion that Christianity is a fable ; and hold fast, in all its beauty, and in all its integrity, the truth, that “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins<sup>1</sup>.”

Yea, and it is a growing and strengthening evidence which God, of his goodness, has thus prepared for our poor. Whensoever they obey a direction of Scripture, and find the accompanying promise fulfilled, this is a new proof that the direction and the promise are from God. The book tells them that blessings are to be sought and obtained through the name of Christ. They ask and they receive. What is this but a witness that the book is divine ? Would God give his sanction to a lie ? The book assures them that the Holy Spirit will gradually sanctify those who believe upon Jesus. They find the sanctification following on the belief ; and does not this attest the authority of the volume ? The book declares that “all things work together for good<sup>2</sup>” to the disciples of Jesus. They find that

<sup>1</sup> 1 John ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

prosperity and adversity, as each brings its trials, so each its lessons and supports; and whilst God thus continually verifies a declaration, can they doubt that he made it? And thus, day by day, the self-evidencing power of Scripture comes into fuller operation, and experience multiplies and strengthens the internal testimony. The peasant will discover more and more that the Bible and the conscience so fit into each other, that the artificer who made one must have equally fashioned both. His life will be an on-going proof that Scripture is truth; for his days and hours are its chapters and verses realized to the letter. And others may admire the shield which the industry and ingenuity of learned men have thrown over Christianity. They may speak of the solid rampart cast up by the labour of ages; and pronounce the faith unassailable, because history, and philosophy, and science, have all combined to gird round it the iron, and the rock, of a ponderous and colossal demonstration. We, for our part, glory most in the fact, that Scripture so commends itself to the conscience, and experience so bears out the Bible, that the Gospel can go the round of the world, and carry with it, in all its travel, its own mighty credentials. And though we depreciate not, but rather confess thankfully, the worth of external evidence, we still think it the noblest provision of God, that if the external were destroyed, the internal would remain, and splendidly uphold Christianity. There is nothing which we

reckon more wonderful in arrangement, nothing more deserving all the warmth of our gratitude, than that divine truth, by its innate power, could compel the Corinthian sceptic<sup>1</sup> to fall down upon his face; and that this truth, by the same innate power, can so satisfy a reader of its origin, that ploughmen as well as theologians, have reason for their hope, and the Christianity of villages, as much as the Christianity of universities, can defy infidelity, and hold on undaunted by all the buffetings of the adversary.

And if we now sum up this portion of our argument, we may say, that God has so constructed his word that it carries with it its own witness to the poor man's intellect, and the poor man's heart. Thus, although it were idle to contend that the poor can show you, with a learned precision, the authenticity of Scripture, or call in the aids which philosophy has furnished, or strengthen their faith from the wonderworkings of nature, or mount and snatch conviction from the glittering tracery on the overhead canopy; still they may feel, whilst perusing the Bible, that it so speaks to the heart, that it tells them so fully all they most want to know, that it so verifies itself in every-day experience, that it humbles them so much and rejoices them so much, that it strikes with such energy on every chord—in short, that it so commends itself to every faculty as purely

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

divine—that they could sooner believe that God made not the stars, than that God wrote not the Scriptures; and thus equipped with powerful machinery for resisting the infidel, they give proof the most conclusive, that “thou, O God, hast prepared, of thy goodness, for the poor.”

Such are the illustrations which we would advance of the truth of our text, when reference is had to spiritual provision. We shall only, in conclusion, commend the subject to your earnest meditation; assuring you that the more it is examined, the more will it be found fraught with interest and instruction. There is something exquisitely touching in an exhibition of God as providing sedulously, both in temporal and spiritual things, for the poor and illiterate. “The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season<sup>1</sup>.” God is that marvellous being to whom the only great thing is Himself. A world is to Him an atom, and an atom is to Him a world. And as, therefore, he cannot be mastered by what is vast and enormous, so he cannot overlook what is minute and insignificant. There is not, then, a smile on a poor man’s cheek, and there is not a tear in a poor man’s eye, either of which is independent on the providence of Him who gilds with the lustre of his countenance the unlimited concave, and measures, in the hollow of his hand, the waters of fathomless oceans. And

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxlv. 15.

that "the poor have the Gospel preached to them<sup>1</sup>," is one of the strongest evidences on the side of Christianity. It was given to John the Baptist as a mark by which he might prove Christ the promised Messiah. He might hence learn that Jesus had come, not to make God known, exclusively, to the learned and great; but that, breaking loose from the trammels of a figurative dispensation, he was dealing with the mechanic at his wheel, and with the slave at his drudgery, and with the beggar in his destitution. Had Christ sent to the imprisoned servant of the Lord, and told him that he was fascinating the philosopher with sublime disclosures of the nature of Deity, and drawing after him the learned of the earth by powerful and rhetorical delineations of the wonders of the invisible world; but that, all the while, he had no communications for the poor and common-place crowd; why, John might have been dazzled for a time by the splendour of his miracles, and he might have mused, wonderingly, on the displayed ascendancy over diseases and death; but, quickly, he must have thought, this is not revealing God to the ignorant and destitute, and this cannot be the religion designed for all nations and ranks. But when the announcement of wonder-workings was followed by the declaration that glad tidings of deliverance were being published to the poor, the Baptist would readily perceive, that the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 5.

long looked-for close to a limited dispensation was contemplated in the mission of Jesus; that Jesus, in short, was introducing precisely the system which Messiah might be expected to introduce; and thus, finding that the doctrines bore out the miracles, he would admit at once his pretensions, not merely because he gave sight to the blind, but because, preaching the Gospel to the ignorant, he showed that God, of his goodness, had prepared for the poor.

And that the Gospel should be adapted, as well as preached, to the poor—adapted in credentials as well as in doctrines—this is one of those arrangements, which, as devised, show infinite love, as executed, infinite wisdom. Who will deny that God had thrown himself into Christianity, even as into the system of the visible universe, since the meanest can trace his footsteps, and feel themselves environed with the marchings of the Eternal One? Oh, we do think it cause of mighty gratulation, in days when infidelity, no longer confining itself to literary circles, has gone down to the homes and the haunts of our peasantry, and seeks to prosecute an impious crusade amongst the very lowest of our people—we do think it cause of mighty gratulation, that God should have thus garrisoned the poor against the inroads of scepticism. We have no fears for the vital and substantial Christianity of the humbler classes of society. They may seem, at first sight, unequipped for the combat. On a human calcu-



lation it might amount almost to a certainty, that infidel publications, or infidel men, working their way into the cottages of the land, would gain an easy victory, and bear down, without difficulty, the faith and piety of the unprepared inmates. But God has had a care for the poor of the flock. He loves them too well to leave them defenceless. And now—appealing to that witness which every one who believes will find in himself—we can feel that the Christianity of the illiterate has in it as much of stamina as the Christianity of the educated; and we can, therefore, be confident that the scepticism which shrinks from the batteries of the learned theologian, will gain no triumphs at the firesides of our God-fearing rustics.

We thank thee, O Father of heaven and earth, that thou hast thus made the Gospel of thy Son its own witness, and its own rampart. We thank thee that thou didst so breathe thyself into apostles and prophets, that their writings are thine utterance, and declare to all ages thine authorship. And now, what have we to ask, but that, if there be one here who has hitherto been stouthearted and unbelieving, the delivered word may prove itself divine, by “piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit<sup>1</sup>,” and that, whilst we announce that “God is angry with the wicked<sup>2</sup>,” that those who forget Him shall be turned into hell; but that, neverthe-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm vii. 11.

less, he hath "so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son <sup>1</sup>" for its redemption—oh, we ask that the careless one, hearing truths at once so terrifying, and so encouraging, may be humbled to the dust, and yet animated with hope; and that, stirred by the divinity which embodies itself in the message, he may flee, "poor in spirit <sup>2</sup>," to Jesus, and, drawing out of his fulness, be enabled to testify to all around, that "thou, O God, hast of thy goodness prepared for the poor."

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 3.

## SERMON IX.

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ST. PAUL A TENT-MAKER.

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ACTS xviii. 3.

“ And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought : for by their occupation they were tent-makers.”

THE argument which may be drawn, in support of Christianity, from the humble condition of its earliest teachers, is often, and fairly, insisted on in disputations with the sceptic. We scarcely know a finer vantage-ground, on which the champion of truth can plant himself, than that of the greater credulity which must be shown in the rejection, than in the reception, of Christianity. We mean to assert, in spite of the tauntings of those most thorough of all bondsmen, free-thinkers, that the faith required from deniers of revelation is far larger than that demanded from its advocates. He who thinks that the setting-up of Christianity may satisfactorily be accounted for on the supposition of its falsehood, taxes credulity a vast deal more than he who believes all the prodigies, and all the miracles, recorded in Scripture. The most marvellous of all prodigies, and the most

surpassing of all miracles, would be the progress of the Christian religion, supposing it untrue. And, assuredly, he who has wrought himself into the belief that such a wonder has been exhibited, can have no right to boast himself shrewder and more cautious, than he who holds, that, at human bidding, the sun stood still; or that tempests were hushed, and graves rifled, at the command of one "found in fashion" as ourselves. The fact that Christianity strode onward with a resistless march, making triumphant way against the banded power, and learning, and prejudices of the world—this fact, we say, requires to be accounted for; and, inasmuch as there is no room for questioning its accuracy, we ask, in all justice, to be furnished with its explanation. We turn, naturally, from the result to the engines by which, to all human appearance, the result was brought round; from the system preached, to the preachers themselves. Were those who first propounded Christianity men who, from station in society, and influence over their fellows, were likely to succeed in palming falsehood on the world? Were they possessed of such machinery of intelligence, and wealth, and might, and science, that—every allowance being made for human credulity and human infatuation—there would appear the very lowest probability, that, having forged a lie, they could have caused it speedily to be venerated as truth, and carried along the earth's diameter amid the worshippings of thousands of the earth's popula-

tion? We have no intention, on the present occasion, of pursuing the argument. But we are persuaded that no candid mind can observe the speed with which Christianity overran the civilized world, compelling the homage of kings, and casting down the altars of long-cherished superstitions: and then compare the means with the effect—the apostles, men of low birth, and poor education, backed by no authority, and possessed of none of those high-wrought endowments which mark out the achievers of difficult enterprise—we are persuaded, we say, that no candid mind can set what was done side by side with the apparatus through which it was effected, and not confess, that, of all incredible things, the most incredible would be, that a few fishermen of Galilee vanquished the world, upheaving its idolatries and mastering its prejudices, and yet that their only weapon was a lie, their only mechanism jugglery and deceit.

And this it is which the sceptic believes. Yea, on his belief of this he grounds claims to a sounder, and shrewder, and less fettered understanding, than belongs to the mass of his fellows. He deems it the mark of a weak and ill-disciplined intellect to admit the truth of Christ's raising the dead; but appeals, in proof of a staunch and well-informed mind, to his belief that this whole planet was convulsed by the blow of an infant. He scorns the narrow-mindedness of submission to what he calls priestcraft; but counts himself large-minded, because he admits that

a priestcraft, only worthy his contempt, ground into powder every system which he thinks worthy his admiration. He laughs at the credulity of supposing that God had to do with the institution of Christianity; and then applauds the sobriety of referring to chance what bears all the marks of design—proving himself rational by holding that causes are not necessary to effects.

Thus we recur to our position, that, if the charge of credulity must be fastened on either the opponents, or the advocates, of Christianity, then, of the two, the opponents lie vastly most open to the accusation. Men pretend to more than ordinary wisdom because they reject, as incredible, occurrences and transactions, which others account for as supernatural. But where is their much-vaunted wisdom, when it can be shown, to a demonstration, that they admit things a thousand-fold stranger than those, which, with all the parade of intellectual superiority, they throw from them as too monstrous for credence? We give it you as a truth, susceptible of the rigour of mathematical proof, that the phenomena of Christianity can only be explained by conceding its divinity. If Christianity came from God, there is an agency adequate to the result; and you can solve its making way amongst the nations. But if Christianity came not from God, no agency can be assigned at all commensurate with the result; and you cannot account for its marchings over the face of the earth. So that when—setting aside every other consideration—we

mark the palpable unfitness of the apostles for devising, and carrying into effect, a grand scheme of imposture, we feel that we do right in retorting on the sceptic the often-urged charge of credulity. We tell him, that if it prove a clear-sighted intellect, to believe that unsupported men would league in an enterprise which was nothing less than a crusade against the world ; that ignorant men could concoct a system overpassing, confessedly, the wisdom of the noblest of the heathen ; and that this insignificant and unequipped band would go through fire and water, brave the lion and dare the stake, knowing, all the while, that they battled for a lie, and crowned, all the while, with overpowering success—ay, we tell the sceptic, that, if a belief such as this prove a clear-sighted intellect, he is welcome to the laurels of reason : and we, for our part, shall contentedly herd with the irrational, who are weak enough to think it credible that the apostles were messengers from God ; and only incredible that mountains fell when there was nothing to shake them, and oceans dried up when there was nothing to drain them, and that there passed over a creation an unmeasured revolution, without a cause, and without a mover, and without a Deity.

Now we have advanced these hurried remarks on a well-known topic of Christian advocacy, because our text leads us, as it were, into the workshop of the first teachers of our faith, and thus forces on us the contemplation of their lowly and destitute estate.

It is not, however, our design to pursue further the argument. We may derive other, and not less important lessons from the simple exhibition of Paul, and Aquila, and Priscilla, plying their occupation as tent-makers. It should just be premised, that, so far as Paul himself is concerned, we must set down his labouring for a living as actually a consequence on his preaching Christianity. Before he engaged in the service of Christ, he had occupied a station in the upper walks of society, and was not, we may believe, dependent on his industry for his bread. It was, however, the custom of the Jews to teach children, whatever the rank of their parents, some kind of handicraft; so that in case of a reverse of circumstances, they might have a resource to which to betake themselves. We conclude that, in accordance with this custom, St. Paul, as a boy, had learned the art of tent-making; though he may not have exercised it for a subsistence until he had spent all in the service of Jesus. We appeal not, therefore, to the instance of this great apostle to the Gentiles as confirming, in every respect, our foregoing argument. St. Paul was eminent both for learning and talent. And it would not, therefore, be just to reason from his presumed incompetency to carry on a difficult scheme, since, at the least, he was not disqualified for undertakings which crave a master-spirit at their head. It is certain, however, that, in these respects, St. Paul was an exception to the rest of the first preachers of Christianity. Our general



reasoning, therefore, remains quite unaffected, whatever be urged in regard to a particular case.

But we have already said, that the main business of our discourse is to derive other lessons from our text than that which refers to the evidences of Christianity. We waive, therefore, further inquiry into that proof of the divinity of the system which is furnished by the poverty of the teachers. We will sit down, as it were, by St. Paul whilst busied with his tent-making; and, considering who and what the individual is who thus lives by his art-sanship, draw that instruction from the scene which we may suppose it intended to furnish.

Now called as St. Paul had been by miracle to the apostleship of Christ, so that he was suddenly transformed from a persecutor into a preacher of the faith, we might well look to find in him a pre-eminent zeal; just as though the unearthly light, which flashed across his path, had entered into his heart, and lit up there a fire inextinguishable by the deepest waters of trouble. And it is beyond all peradventure, that there never moved upon our earth a heartier, more unwearied, more energetic, disciple of Jesus. His motto was to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ<sup>1</sup>;" and crossing seas, and exhausting continents, till a vast portion of the known world had heard from his lips the tidings of redemption, he

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 8.

proved the motto engraven on his soul, and showed that the desire of bringing the perishing into acquaintance with a Saviour was nothing less than the life's-blood of his system. And we are bound to suppose, that, where there existed so glowing a zeal, prompting him to be "instant in season, out of season<sup>1</sup>," the irksomeness of mechanical labour must have been greater than it is easy to compute. Since the whole soul was wrapped up in the work of the ministry, it could not have been without a feeling, amounting almost to painfulness, that the apostle abstracted himself from the business of his embassy, and toiled at providing for his own bodily necessities. We see, at once, that so far as any appointment of God could be grievous to a man of St. Paul's exemplary holiness, this appointment must have been hard to endure; and we cannot contemplate the great apostle, withdrawn from the spirit-stirring scenes of his combats with idolatry, and earning a meal like a common artificer, and not feel that the effort of addressing the Athenians, congregated on Areopagus, was as nothing to that of sitting down patiently to all the drudgery of the craftsman.

But we go on to infer from these unquestionable facts, that, unless there had been great ends which St. Paul's labouring subserved, God would not have permitted this sore exercise of his servant. There

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 2.

is allotted to no Christian a trial without a reason. And if then we are once certified, that the working for his bread was a trial to St. Paul, we must go forward and investigate the reasons of the appointment.

Now we learn from the epistles of St. Paul, that when he refused to be maintained by the churches which he planted, it was through fear that the success of his preaching might be interfered with by suspicions of his disinterestedness. He chose to give the Gospel without cost, in order that his enemies might have no plea for representing him as an hireling, and thus depreciating his message. In this respect he appears to have acted differently from the other apostles, since we find him thus expostulating with the Corinthians: "have we not power to eat and to drink? or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working<sup>1</sup>?" He evidently argues, that had he so pleased, he might justly have done what his fellow-apostles did, receive temporal benefits from those to whom they were the instruments of communicating spiritual. It was a law, whose justice admitted not of controversy, that "the labourer is worthy of his hire<sup>2</sup>." And, therefore, however circumstances might arise, rendering it advisable that the right should be waved, St. Paul desired the Corinthians to understand, that, had he chosen, he might have claimed

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 4. 6.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. v. 18.

the sustenance for which he was contented to toil. It was a right, and not a favour, which he waved. And if there were no other lesson deducible from the manual occupation of the apostle, we should do well to ponder the direction thus practically given, that we remove all occasions of offence. St. Paul gave up even his rights, fearing lest their enforcement might possibly impede the progress of the Gospel. So single-eyed was this great teacher of the Gentiles, that when the reception of the message, and the maintenance of the messenger, seemed at all likely to clash, he would gladly devote the day to the service of others, and then toil through the night to make provision for himself. If ever, therefore, it happen, either to minister or to people, to find that the pushing a claim, or the insisting on a right, would bring discredit, though unjustly and wrongfully, on the cause of religion; let it be remembered that our prime business, as professors of godliness, is with the glory of God and the advance of the Gospel; that the avoiding evil is a great thing, but that the scriptural requisition is, that we avoid even the "appearance of evil"<sup>1</sup>. And if there seem to us a hardness in this, so that we count it too much of concession, that we fall back from demands which strict justice would warrant, let us betake ourselves, for an instant, to the workshop of St. Paul; and there remembering, whilst

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. v. 22.

this servant of Christ is fashioning the canvass, that he labours for bread, which, by an indisputable title, is already his own, we may learn it a Christian's duty to allow himself to be wronged, when, by staunch standing to his rights, Christ's cause may be injured.

But as yet we are only on the outskirts of our subject. The grand field of inquiry still remains to be traversed. We have seen, that, in order to foreclose all question of his sincerity and disinterestedness, St. Paul chose to ply at his tent-making rather than derive a maintenance from his preaching. We next observe, that, had not his poverty been on other accounts advantageous, we can scarcely think that this single reason would have procured its permission. He might have refused to draw an income from his converts, and yet not have been necessitated to betake himself to handicraft. We know that God could have poured in upon him, through a thousand channels, the means of subsistence; and we believe, therefore, that had his toiling subserved no end but the removal of causes of offence, his wants would have been supplied, though without any burden on the churches. So that the question comes before us, unsolved and unexamined, why was it permitted that St. Paul, in the midst of his exertions as a minister of Christ, should be compelled to support himself by manual occupation? We think that two great reasons may be advanced, each of which will deserve a careful examination.

In the first place, God hereby put much honour upon industry: in the second place, God hereby showed, that where he has appointed means, he will not work by miracles. We will take these reasons in succession, proceeding at once to endeavour to prove, that in leaving St. Paul to toil as a tent-maker, God put much honour upon industry.

Now it is true that the appointment, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread<sup>1</sup>," was part of the original malediction which apostasy caused to be breathed over this creation. But it is equally true that labour was God's ordinance whilst man kept unsullied his loyalty, and that it was not bound upon our race as altogether a consequence on transgression. We may not believe that in Paradise labour could ever have been wearisome; but we know that, from the first, labour was actually man's business. We are told, in the book of Genesis, that when the Lord God had planted the garden, and fashioned man after his own image, "he took the man and put him into the garden, to dress it, and to keep it<sup>2</sup>." There was no curse upon the ground; and, therefore, we suppose not that it required, ere it would give forth a produce, the processes of a diligent husbandry. But, nevertheless, it is clear that the resting of God's first blessing on the soil put not aside all necessity of culture. Man was a

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. ii. 15.

labourer from the beginning; God's earliest ordinance appearing to have been, that man should not be an idler. So that whilst we admit that all that painfulness and exhaustion, which waits ordinarily upon human occupation, must be traced up to disobedience as a parent, we contend that employment is distinctly God's institution for mankind, no reference whatsoever being made to the innocence or guiltiness of the race. God sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest, before Adam disobeyed, and thus marked out six days as days of labour and employment, before sin sowed the seeds of the thorn and the thistle. We may suppose, that, previously to the fall, labour, so to speak, was just one department of piety; and that in tilling the ground, or watching the herds, man was as religiously occupied as when communing with God in distinct acts of devotion. The great and fatal alteration which sin has introduced into labour, is, that a wide separation has been made between temporal business and spiritual; so that, whilst engaged in providing for the body, we seem wholly detached from paying attention to the concerns of the soul. But we hold it of first-rate importance to teach men that this separation is of their own making, and not of God's appointing. God ordained labour: and God also ordained that man's great business on earth should be to secure his soul's safety through eternity. And unless, therefore, we admit that the work of the

soul's salvation may be actually advanced by, and through, our worldly occupations, we set one ordinance of God against another, and represent ourselves as impeded, by the appointments of our Maker, in the very business most pressed on our performance. The matter-of-fact is, that God may as truly be served by the husbandman whilst ploughing up his ground, and by the manufacturer whilst toiling at his loom, and by the merchant whilst engaged in his commerce, as he can be by any of these men when gathered by the Sabbath-bell to the solemn assembly. It is a perfect libel on religion, to represent the honest trades of mankind as aught else but the various methods in which God may be honoured and obeyed. We do not merely mean that worldly occupations may be followed without harm done to the soul. This would be no vindication of God's ordinance of labour. We mean that they may be followed with benefit to the soul. When God led the eastern Magi to Christ, he led them by a star. He attacked them, so to speak, through the avenue of their profession. Their great employment was that of observing the heavenly bodies. And God sanctified their astronomy. He might have taught them by other methods which seem to us more direct. But it pleased Him to put honour on their occupation, and to write his lessons in that glittering alphabet with which their studies had made them especially conversant. We believe, in like manner, that if men went to their daily



employments with something of the temper which they bring to the ordinances of grace, expecting to receive messages from God through trade, and through labour, as well as through preaching and a communion, there would be a vast advancing towards spiritual excellence; and men's experience would be that the Almighty can bring them into acquaintance with Himself, by the ploughshare, and the balances, and the cargo, no less than by the homily, and the closet-exercises, and the public devotions. There would be an anticipation of the glorious season, sketched out by prophecy, when "there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord, and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar<sup>1</sup>."

We give this as our belief: and we advance as our reason, the fact that labour is the ordinance of God. We will not have industry set against piety; as though the little time which men can snatch from secular engagements were the only time which they can give to their Maker. They may give all to God, and, nevertheless, be compelled to rise early, and late take rest, in order to earn a scanty subsistence. And we think, that, in placing an apostle under the necessity of labouring for bread, God assigned precisely that character to industry for which we contend. We learn, from the exhibition of our text, that there is no inconsistency between

<sup>1</sup> Zach. xiv. 20.

the being a devoted servant of Christ, and the following assiduously a toilsome occupation. Nay, we learn that it may be, literally, as the servant of Christ that man follows the occupation ; for it was, as we have shown you, with decided reference to the interests of religion, that St. Paul joined Aquila and Priscilla in tent-making. At the least, there is a registered demonstration in the case of this apostle, that unwearied industry—for he elsewhere declares that he laboured day and night—may consist with pre-eminent piety ; and that, so far from the pressure of secular employment being a valid excuse for slow progress in godliness, a man may have to struggle against absolute pauperism, and yet grow every moment a more admirable Christian. Oh, there is something in this representation of the honour put by God upon industry, which should tell powerfully on the feelings of those to whom life is one long striving for the means of subsistence. It were as nothing to tell men, you may be good Christians in spite of your engrossing employments. The noble truth is, that these employments may be so many helpers on of religion ; and that in place of serving as leaden weights, which retard a disciple in his celestial career, they may be as the well-plumed wings, accelerating gloriously the onward progress. In labouring to support himself, St. Paul laboured to advance Christ's cause. And though there be not always the same well-defined connexion between our toils for a livelihood and the interests of religion,

yet, let a connexion be practically sought after, and it will always be practically found. The case exists not in which, after making it obligatory on a man that, he work for his bread, God has not arranged, that in thus working, he may work also for the well-being of his soul. If ever, therefore, we met with an individual, who pleaded that there were already so many calls upon his time that he could not find leisure to give heed to religion, we should not immediately bear down upon him with the charge—though it might be a just one—of an undue pursuit of the things of this earth. We should only require of him to show that his employments were scripturally lawful both in nature and intenseness. We should then meet him, at once, on the ground of this lawfulness. We should tell him that employments were designed to partake of the nature of sacraments; that, in place of their being excuses for his not serving God, they were appointed as instruments by which he might serve Him; and that, consequently, it was only because he had practically dissolved a partnership which the Almighty had formed, the partnership between industry and piety, that he was driving on, with a reckless speed, to a disastrous and desperate bankruptcy. And if he pretended to doubt that piety and industry have thus been associated by God, we would take him with us into the work-chamber of St. Paul; and there showing him the apostle toiling against want, and yet, in toiling, serving Christ Jesus—subsisting

by his artisanship, and yet feeding the zeal of his soul by and through his labours for the support of his body—we would tell the questioner, that God thus caused a mighty specimen to be given of an instituted connexion between secular employment and spiritual improvement; and whilst we send him to the writings of St. Paul that he may learn what it is to be industriously religious, we send him to the tent-making of St. Paul that he may learn what it is to be religiously industrious.

Now we might insist at greater length, if not pressed by the remainder of our subject, on the honour which God put upon industry when he left St. Paul to toil for a maintenance. But we leave this point to be further pondered in your private meditations. We go on, according to the arrangements of our discourse, to open up the second reason which we ventured to assign for this allowed dependence of an apostle upon labour for subsistence.

We stated as our second reason, that God designed hereby to inform us, that where he has appointed means, he will not work by miracles. We observe that unto St. Paul had been given a superhuman energy, so that, when it was required as a witness to his doctrine, he could remove diseases by a word or a touch, and even restore life to the dead. We have no distinct information whether men, thus supernaturally equipped, could employ the power at every time, and for every purpose. But it seems most consistent with Scripture and reason to suppose, that,

when specially moved by God, they could always work miracles ; but that, unless thus moved, their strength went from them, and they remained no mightier than their fellows. It does not appear that apostles could have recourse to wonder-workings in every exigence which might arise. At least, it is certain that apostolical men, such as Epaphroditus and Timothy, went through sicknesses, and suffered from weaknesses, without being cured by miracle, and without, as it would seem, being taxed with deficiency of faith, because they shook not off the malady, or resisted not its approaches. When St. Paul writes to Timothy in regard to his infirmities, he bids him use wine as a medicine ; he does not tell him to seek faith to work a miracle. Yet, beyond all doubt, Timothy had received the gifts of the Spirit. And from this, and other instances, we infer that then only could miracles be wrought, when, by a distinct motion of the Holy Ghost, faith was directed to some particular achievement. It did not follow that because St. Peter, by a word, had struck down Ananias, he might, by a word, have immediately afterwards raised him up. It was not at his option what direction the miracle-working faith should take. Whensoever a miracle was wrought, it was wrought, unquestionably, by faith. But the faith, first given by God, required ever after to be stirred into exercise by God ; so that no conclusion could be more erroneous, than that faith must have been defective, where miracle was not wrought.

Now we advance these remarks, in order to justify our not claiming for St. Paul what, at first sight, we are disposed to claim, the praise of extraordinary self-denial in gaining his bread by labour, when he might have gained it by miracle. We may not suppose, that, because he displayed oftentimes a super-human power, he could necessarily, had he wished it, have used that power in supplying his bodily wants. It may seem to us no greater effort, to multiply, as Christ did, a loaf into hundreds, than to command, as St. Paul did, the impotent man at Lystra to stand upright on his feet. Yet it were a false conclusion that the apostle might have done the one as well as the other.

The working of miracles presupposed, as we have shown you, not only God's giving the faith, but also God's permitting, or rather God's directing, its exercise. We build, therefore, no statements on the supposition that St. Paul had the power, but used it not, of procuring food by miracle. We rather conclude that he had no alternative whatever: so that, had he not laboured at tent-making, he must have been absolutely destitute. It was not indeed because deficient in faith that he wrought not a miracle. He had the faith by which lofty hills might be stirred, provided only—and it is this proviso which men strangely overlook—that he, who had given him the faith, directed him to employ it on upheaving the earth's mountains.

But we are thus brought down to the question,

why was St. Paul not permitted, or not directed, to use the wonder-working energy, in place of being necessitated to apply himself to manual occupation? We give as our reply, that God might hereby have designed to communicate the important truth, that, where he has appointed means, we are not to look for miracles. Labour was his own ordinance. So long, therefore, as labour could be available to the procuring subsistence, he would not supersede this ordinance by miraculous interference. There is, perhaps, no feature more strongly characterized on God's dealings, whether in natural things or in spiritual, than that it is in the use of means, and in this alone, that blessings may be expected. We see clearly that this is God's procedure in reference to the affairs of our present state of being. If the husbandman neglect the processes of agriculture, there comes no miracle to make up this omission of means; but harvest-time finds barrenness reigning over the estate. If the merchantman sit with his hands folded, when he ought to be busied with shipping his merchandise, there is nothing to be expected but that beggary will ensue upon idleness. And we hold that instances such as these, so familiar that they are often overlooked, must be taken as illustrations of a great principle whose workings permeate all God's dispensations. We would contend that there is to be traced in our spiritual affairs that very honouring of means which is thus observable in our temporal. We know nothing of the fitness, which some men are

disposed to uphold, of waiting the effectual calling of the Holy Ghost, and so of making no effort, till irresistibly moved, to escape from the bondage of corruption. We know of no scriptural method of addressing transgressors but as free agents; and we abjure, as unsanctioned by the Bible, every scheme of theology, which would make men nothing more than machines. It must lie at the foundation of all religion, whether natural or revealed, that men are responsible beings; and responsible they cannot be, if placed under an invincible moral constraint, which allows no freedom whatsoever of choice. And we think it a thing to be sorely lamented, that there goes on a battling about election and non-election; the combatants on each side failing to perceive, that they fight for the profile, and not the full-face, of truth. It seems to us as plain from the Bible as language can make it, that God hath elected a remnant to life. It is just as plain, that all men are addressed as capable of repenting, and at liberty to choose for themselves between life and death. Thus we have scriptural warranty of God's election; and we have also scriptural warranty of man's free agency. But how can these apparently opposite statements be reconciled? I know not. The Bible tells me not. But because I cannot be wise beyond what is written, God forbid that I should refuse to be wise up to what is written. Scripture reveals, but it does not reconcile, the two. What then? I receive both, and I preach both; God's election, and



man's free agency. But I should esteem it of all presumptions the boldest to attempt explanation of the co-existence.

In like manner, the Bible tells me explicitly that Christ was God; and it tells me, as explicitly, that Christ was man. It does not go on to state the *modus* or manner of the union. I stop, therefore, where the Bible stops. I bow before a God-man as my Mediator, but I own as inscrutable the mysteries of his person.

It is thus also with the doctrine of the Trinity. Three persons are set before me as equally divine. At the same time, I am taught that there is only one God. How can the three be one, and the one be three? Silent as the grave is the Bible on this wonder. But I do not reject its speech because of its silence. I believe in three divine persons, because told of a Trinity; I believe in one only God, because told of an Unity: but I leave to the developments of a nobler sphere of existence the clearing up the marvel of a Trinity in Unity.

The admission, then, of the co-existence of election and free agency is but the counterpart of many other admissions which are made, on all hands, by the believers in revelation. And having assured ourselves of this joint existence, we see, at once, that man's business is to set about the work of his salvation, with all the ardour, and all the pains-taking, of one convinced that he cannot perish, except through his own fault. We address him as an immortal creature

whose destinies are in his own keeping. We will hear nothing of a secret decree of God, insuring him safe passage to a haven of rest, or leaving him to go down a wreck in the whirlpool. But we tell him of a command of God, summoning him to put forth all his strength and all his seamanship, ere the breakers dash against him, and the rocks rise around him. We thus deal with man as a responsible being. You are waiting for a miracle; have you tried the means? You are trusting to a hidden purpose; have you submitted yourselves to a revealed command? Sitting still is no proof of election. Grappling with evil is a proof; and wrenching one's self from hurtful associations is a proof; and studying God's word is a proof; and praying for assistance is a proof. He who resolves to do nothing until he is called—oh, the likelihood is beyond calculation, that he will have no call, till the sheeted dead are starting at the trumpet-call. And the vessel—freighted as she was with noble capacities, with intelligence, and reason, and forethought, and the deep throbbings of immortality—what account shall be given of her making no way towards the shores of the saints' home, but remaining to be broken up piecemeal by the sweepings of the judgment? Simply, that God told man of a compass, and of a chart, and of a wind, and of a pilot. But man determined to remain anchored, until God should come and tear the ship from her moorings. God has appointed means. If we will use them diligently, and prayerfully, we may look

for a blessing. But if we despise and neglect them, we must not look for a miracle.

And if a man be resolved to give harbourage to the idea, that means may be dispensed with, and that then miracles will be wrought, we open before him the scenery of our text, and bid him behold the artificers at their labour. We tell him, that around one of these workmen the priests of Jupiter had thronged, bearing garlands, and bringing sacrifices, because of a displayed mastery over inveterate disease. We tell him, that, if there arose an occasion demanding the exhibition of prodigy in support of Christ's Gospel, this toiling artisan could throw aside the implements of trade, and, rushing into the crowded arena, confound an army of opponents by suspending the known laws of nature. And, nevertheless, this mightily-gifted individual must literally starve, or drudge for a meal like the meanest mechanic. And why so? why, but because it is a standing appointment of God, that miracles shall not supersede means? If there were no means, Paul should have his bread by miracle. But whilst there is the canvass, and the cord, and the sight in the eye, and the strength in the limb, he may carry on the trade of a tent-maker. He has the tools of his craft: let him use them industriously, and not sit inactive, hoping to be supported miraculously. And, arguing from this as a thorough specimen of God's ordinary dealings, we tell the expectant of an effectual call, that he waits as an idler whilst God requires

him to work as a labourer. Where are the tools? Why left on the ground, when they should be in the hand? Where are the means? Why passed over, when they ought to be employed? Why neglected, when they should be honoured? Why treated as worthless, when God declares them efficacious? It is true that conversion is a miracle. But God's common method of working this miracle is through the machinery of means. It is true that none but the elect can be saved. But the only way to ascertain election is to be laborious in striving. I read St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans; and I find the apostle saying, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy<sup>1</sup>." What then? Must I, on this account, run not, but sit still, expecting the approaches of mercy? Away with the thought. Means are God's high road to miracles. I turn from the apostle writing to the Romans, to the apostle toiling at Corinth. And when I look on the labours of the tent-maker, and infer from them that miracles must not be expected where means have been instituted, and that, consequently, whensoever God has appointed means, miracle is to be looked for only in their use; oh, in place of loitering because I have read of election, I would gird up the loins as having gazed on the tent-making; and in place of running not, because it is "of God that showeth mercy," run might and

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ix. 16.

main, because it is to those who are running that he shows it.

When God decrees an end, he decrees also the means. If, then, he have elected me to obtain salvation in the next life, he has elected me to the practice of holiness in this life. Would I ascertain my election to the blessedness of eternity? it must be by practically demonstrating my election to newness of life. It is not by the rapture of feeling, and by the luxuriance of thought, and by the warmth of those desires which descriptions of heaven may stir up within me, that I can prove myself predestined to a glorious inheritance. If I would find out what is hidden, I must follow what is revealed. The way to heaven is disclosed; am I walking in that way? It would be poor proof that I were on my voyage to India, that, with glowing eloquence, and thrilling poetry, I could discourse on the palm-groves and the spice-isles of the East. Am I on the waters? Is the sail hoisted to the wind; and does the land of my birth look blue and faint in the distance? The doctrine of election may have done harm to many—but only because they have fancied themselves elected to the end, and have forgotten that those whom Scripture calls elected are elected to the means. The Bible never speaks of men as elected to be saved from the shipwreck; but only as elected to tighten the ropes, and hoist the sails, and stand to the rudder. Let a man search faithfully; let him see that when Scripture describes Christians as elected,

it is, as elected to faith, as elected to sanctification, as elected to obedience; and the doctrine of election will be nothing but a stimulus to effort. It cannot act as a soporific. It cannot lull me into security. It cannot engender licentiousness. It will throw ardour into the spirit, and fire into the eye, and vigour into the limb. I shall cut away the boat, and let drive all human devices, and gird myself, amid the fierceness of the tempest, to steer the shattered vessel into port.

Now having thus examined the reasons why St. Paul was left dependent upon labour for subsistence, we hasten at once to wind up our subject. We have had under review two great and interesting truths. We have seen that labour is God's ordinance. Be it yours, therefore, to strive earnestly that your worldly callings may be sanctified, so that trade may be the helpmate of religion, instead of its foe and assassin. We have seen also, that, when God has instituted means, we can have no right to be looking for miracles. Will ye then sit still, expecting God to compel you to move? Will ye expose yourselves wantonly to temptation, expecting God to make you impregnable? Will ye take the viper to your bosoms, expecting God to charm away the sting? Will ye tamper with the poison-cup, expecting God to neutralize the hemlock? Then why did not St. Paul, in place of working the canvass into a tent, expect God to convert it into food? We do not idolize means. We do not substitute the means of grace for grace itself. But this we say—and we beseech

you to carry with you the truth to your homes—when God has made a channel, he may be expected to send through that channel the flowings of his mercy. Oh! that ye were anxious: that ye would take your right place in creation, and feel yourselves immortal! Be men, and ye make a vast advance towards being Christians. Many of you have long refused to labour to be saved. The implements are in your hands, but you will not work at the tent-making. Ye will not pray; ye will not shun temptation; ye will not renounce known sin; ye will not fight against evil habits. Are ye stronger than God? Can ye contend with the Eternal One? Have ye the nerve which shall not tremble, and the flesh which shall not quiver, and the soul which shall not quail, when the sheet of fire is round the globe, and thousand times ten thousand angels line the sky, and call to judgment? If we had a spell by which to bind the ministers of vengeance, we might go on in idleness. If we had a charm by which to take what is scorching from the flame, and what is gnawing from the worm, we might continue the careless. But if we can feel; if we are not pain-proof; if we are not wrath-proof; let us arise, and be doing, and, with fear and trembling, work out salvation. There shall yet burst on this creation a day of fire, and of storm, and of blood—oh! conform yourselves to the simple prescriptions of the Bible; seek the aids of God's Spirit by prayer, and ye shall be led to lay hold on Christ Jesus by faith.

## SERMON X.

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### THE ADVANTAGES OF A STATE OF EXPECTATION.

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LAMENTATIONS iii. 26.

“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

You will find it said in the Book of Ecclesiastes, “Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him<sup>1</sup>.” It seems to us implied in these words, that our incapacity of looking into the future has much to do with the production of disquietude and unhappiness. And there is no question that the darkness in which we are compelled to proceed, and the uncertainty which hangs round the issues of our best-arranged schemes, contribute much to the troubles and perplexities of life. Under the present dispensation we must calculate on probabilities; and our calculations, when made with the best care and forethought, are often proved faulty by the result. And if we could substitute certainty for probability,

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. viii. 6.



and thus define, with a thorough accuracy, the workings of any proposed plan, it is evident that we might be saved a vast amount both of anxiety and of disappointment. Much of our anxiety is now derived from the doubtfulness of the success of schemes, and from the likelihood of obstruction and mischance; much of our disappointment from the overthrow and failure of long-cherished purposes. And, of course, if we possessed the same mastery of the future as of the past, we should enter upon nothing which was sure to turn out ill; but, regulating ourselves in every undertaking by foreknown results, avoid much of previous debate and of after regret.

Yet when we have admitted, that want of acquaintance with the future gives rise to much both of anxiety and of disappointment, we are prepared to argue that the possession of this acquaintance would be incalculably more detrimental. It is quite true that there are forms and portions of trouble which might be warded off or escaped, if we could behold what is coming, and take measures accordingly. But it is to the full as true, that the main of what shall befall us is matter of irrevocable appointment, to be averted by no prudence, and dispersed by no bravery. And if we could know beforehand what is to happen, we should, in all probability, be unmanned and enervated; so that an arrest would be put on the businesses of life by previous acquaintance with their several successes.

The parent, who is pouring his attention on the education of a child, or labouring to procure for him advancement and independence, would be unable to go forward with his efforts, if certified that he must follow that child to the grave, so soon as he had fitted him for society and occupation. And even if the map were a bright one, so that we looked on sunny things as fixed for our portion, familiarity with the prospect would deteriorate it to our imagination; and blessings would seem to us of less and less worth, as they came on us more and more as matters of course. In real truth, it is our ignorance of what shall happen which stimulates exertion: we are so constituted that to deprive us of hope would be to make us inactive and wretched. And, therefore, do we hold that one great proof of God's loving-kindness towards us, may be fetched from that impenetrable concealment in which he wraps up to-morrow. We long indeed to bring to-morrow into to-day, and strain the eye in the fruitless endeavour to scan its occurrences. But it is, in a great degree, my ignorance of to-morrow which makes me vigilant, and energetic, and pains-taking, to-day. And if I could see to-day that a great calamity or a great success would undoubtedly befall me to-morrow, the likelihood is that I should be so overcome, either by sorrow or by delight, as to be unfitted for those duties with which the present hour is charged.

Now it were easy to employ ourselves in examin-

ing, more in detail, the bearings on our temporal well-being of that hiding of the future to which we have adverted. Neither would such examination be out of place in a discourse on the words of our text. The prophet refers chiefly to temporal deliverance, when mentioning "the salvation of the Lord." Judah had gone into captivity: and Jerusalem, heretofore a queen amongst the cities, sat widowed and desolate. Yet Jeremiah was persuaded that the Lord would "not cast off for ever<sup>1</sup>;" and he, therefore, encouraged the remnant of his countrymen to expect a better and brighter season. He does not, indeed, predict immediate restoration. But then he asserts that delayed mercy would be more advantageous than instant, and that profit might be derived from expectation as well as from possession. If we paraphrase his words, we may consider him saying to the stricken and disconsolate Jews, you wish an immediate interference of God on behalf of your city and nation. You desire, that without a moment's delay, the captive tribes should march back from Babylon, and Jerusalem rise again in her beauty and her strength. But if this wish were complied with, it would be at the expense of much of the benefit derivable from affliction: for "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

Thus the original design of the passage would

<sup>1</sup> Lam. iii. 31.

warrant our taking a large sweep in its explanation, and leading you over that range of inquiry which is opened by our introductory remarks. We might dilate on the advantageousness of the existing arrangement, and its wondrous adaptation to our moral constitution. We might show you, by references to the engagements and intercourses of life, that it is for our profit that we be uncertain as to issues, and, therefore, required both to hope and to wait. We doubt whether you could imagine a finer discipline for the human mind, than results from the fixed impossibility of our grasping two moments at once. The chief opponent to that feeling of independence which man naturally cherishes, but always to his own hurt, is his utter ignorance of the events of the next minute. For who can boast, or who can feel himself, independent, whilst unable to insure another beat of the pulse, or to decide whether, before he can count two, he shall be spoiled of life or reduced to beggary? It is only in proportion as men close their eyes to their absolute want of mastership over the future, that they encourage themselves in the delusion of independence. If they owned, and felt themselves, the possessors of a single moment, with no more power to secure the following than if the proposed period were a thousand centuries, we might set it down as an unavoidable consequence, that they would shun the presumption of so acting for themselves as though God were excluded from superintending their affairs. And if

there were introduced an opposite arrangement; if men were no longer placed under a system compelling them to hope and to wait; you may all see that the acquired power over the future would produce, in many quarters, an infidel contempt, or denial, of Providence: so that by admitting men to a closer inspection of his workings, God would throw them further off from acquaintance with himself, and reverence of his majesty. Thus the goodness of the existing arrangement is matter of easy demonstration, when that arrangement is considered as including the affairs of every-day life. If you look at the consummation as ordinarily far removed from the formation of a purpose, there is, we again say, a fine moral discipline in the intervening suspense. That men may withstand, or overlook, the discipline, and so miss its advantages, tells nothing against either its existence, or its excellence. And the necessity which is laid on the husbandman, that, after sowing the seed, he wait long for the harvest-time, in hope, but not certainty; and upon the merchantman, that, after despatching his ships, he wait long for the products of commerce, hoping, but far enough from sure, that the voyage and the traffic will be prosperous; this necessity, we say, for hoping and waiting reads the best of all lessons as to actual dependence on an invisible being, and thus verifies our position, that, whatever the desired advantage, "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for" its possession. Aye, and we are well con-

vinced that there cannot be found a nobler argument for the existence of a staunch moral government over the creatures of our race, than results from this imposed necessity, that there elapse a period, and that too a period full of uncertainties, between the forming and completing a design. Amid all the mutiny and uproar of our present torn and disorganized condition, there is a voice, in our utter powerlessness to make sure of the future, which continually recalls man from his rebellion and scepticism; and which, proclaiming, in accents not to be overborne by the fiercest tempest of passion, that he holds every thing at the will of another, shall demand irresistibly his condemnation at any oncoming trial, if he carry it with a high and independent hand against the being thus proved the uncontrolled lord of his destinies.

But we feel it necessary to bring our inquiry within narrower limits, and to take the expression, "the salvation of the Lord," in that more restrained sense which it bears ordinarily in Scripture. We shall employ, therefore, the remainder of our time in endeavouring to prove to you by the simplest reasoning, that it is for our advantage as Christians that salvation, in place of being a thing of certainty and present possession, must be hoped and quietly waited for by believers.

Now whilst it is the business of a Christian minister to guard you against presumption, and an uncalculating confidence that you are safe for eter-

nity, it is also his duty to arouse you to a sense of your privileges, and to press on you the importance of ascertaining your title to immortality. We think it not necessarily a proof of Christian humility, that you should be always in doubt of your spiritual state, and so live uncertain whether, in the event of death, you would pass into glory. We are bound to declare that Scripture makes the marks of true religion clear and decisive; and that, if we will but apply, faithfully and fearlessly, the several criteria furnished by its statements, it cannot remain a problem, which the last judgment only can solve, whether it be the broad way, or the narrow, in which we now walk. But, nevertheless, the best assurance to which a Christian can attain must leave salvation a thing chiefly of hope. We find it expressly declared by St. Paul to the Romans, "we are saved by hope<sup>1</sup>." And they who are most persuaded, and that too by scriptural warrant, that they are in a state of salvation, can never declare themselves, except in the most limited sense, in its fruition or enjoyment; but must always live mainly upon hope, though with occasional foretaste of coming delights. They can reach the conclusion—and a comforting and noble conclusion it is—that they are justified beings, as having been enabled to act faith on a Mediator. But whilst justification insures them salvation, it puts them not into its present possession. It is thus

<sup>1</sup> Rom viii. 24.

again that St. Paul distinguishes between justification and salvation, saying of Christ, "being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him'." So that the knowing ourselves justified is the highest thing attainable on earth; salvation itself, though certain to be reached, remaining an object for which we must hope, and for which we must wait.

Now it is the goodness of this arrangement which is asserted in our text. We can readily suppose an opposite arrangement. We can imagine, that, as soon as a man were justified, he might be translated to blessedness, and that thus the gaining the title, and the entering on possession, might be always contemporary. Since the being justified is the being accepted in God's sight, and counted perfectly righteous, there would seem no insurmountable reason why the justified man should be left, a single moment, a wanderer in the desert; or why the instant of the exertion of saving faith, inasmuch as that exertion makes sure the salvation, should not also be the instant of entrance into glory. To question the possibility of such an arrangement, would be to question the possibility of an outputting of faith at the last moment of life: for, unless what is called death-bed repentance be distinctly an impossible thing, the case is clearly supposable of the justifying act being immediately followed by admission into heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 9.



But the possibility of the arrangement, and its goodness, are quite different questions; and whilst we see that it might have been ordered, that the justified man should at once be translated, we can still believe it good that he "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Our text speaks chiefly of the goodness to the individual himself; but it will be lawful first to consider the arrangement as fraught with advantage to human society.

We must all perceive, that, if true believers were withdrawn from earth at the instant of their becoming such, the influences of piety, which now make themselves felt through the mass of a population, would be altogether destroyed, and the world be deprived of that salt which alone preserves it from total decomposition. We believe that when Christ declared of his followers, "ye are the salt of the earth<sup>1</sup>," he delivered a saying which described, with singular fidelity, the power of righteousness to stay and correct the disorganizations of mankind. As applied to the apostles the definition was especially accurate. There lay before them a world distinguished by nothing so much as by corruption of doctrine and manners. Though philosophy was at its height; though reason had achieved her proudest triumphs; though arts were in their maturity; though eloquence was then most finished, and poetry most harmonious; there reigned over the whole face

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 13.

of the globe a tremendous ignorance of God ; and if humanity were not actually an unsound and putrid mass, it had in it every element of decay, so that, if longer abandoned to itself, it must have fallen into incurable disease, and become covered with the livid spots of total dissolution. And when, by divine commission, the disciples penetrated the recesses of this mass, carrying with them principles, and truths, exactly calculated to stay the moral ruin which was spreading with fearful rapidity—when they went forth, the bearers of celestial communications which taught the soul to feel herself immortal, and, therefore, indestructible ; which lifted even the body out of the grasp of decay, teaching that bone and sinew and flesh should be made at last gloriously incorruptible—when, we say, the disciples thus applied to the world a remedy, perfect in every respect against those tendencies to corruption which threaten to turn our globe into the lazar-house of creation ; were they not to be regarded as the purifiers and preservers of men, and could any title be more just than one which described them, in their strivings to overspread a diseased world with healthfulness, as literally “the salt of the earth?”

But it holds good in every age that true believers are “the salt of the earth.” Whilst the contempt and hatred of the wicked follow incessantly the professors of godliness, and the enemies of Christ, if ability were commensurate with malice, would sweep from the globe all knowledge of the Gospel,

we can venture to assert that the unrighteous owe the righteous a debt of obligation not to be reckoned up; and that it is mainly because the required ten are still found in the cities of the plain, that the fire-showers are suspended, and time given for the warding off by repentance the doom. And over and above this conservative virtue of godliness, it is undeniable that the presence of a pious man in a neighbourhood will tell greatly on its character; and that, in variety of instances, his withdrawment would be followed by wilder outbreakings of profligacy. It must have fallen, we think, within the power of many of you to observe, how a dissolute parish has undergone a species of moral renovation, through the introduction within its circles of a God-fearing individual. He may be despised; he may be scorned; he may be railed at. The old may call him methodist, and the young make him their laughing-stock. But, nevertheless, if he live consistently, if he give the adversary no occasion to blaspheme, he will often, by his very example, go a long way towards stopping the contagion of vice; he will act, that is, as the salt: and if he succeed not—for this is beyond the power of the salt—in restoring to a wholesome texture what is fatally tainted, he will be instrumental to the preserving much which would otherwise have soon yielded to the destructive malaria. It is not merely that his temporal circumstances may have given him ascendancy over his fellows. There is in the human mind—we dare not

say, a bias towards virtue, but—an abiding, and scarcely to be overborne consciousness, that such ought to be the bias, and that, whensoever the practical leaning is to vice, there is irresistible evidence of moral derangement. Whatever the extent of human degeneracy, you will not find that right and wrong have so changed places, that, in being the slaves of vice, men reckon themselves the subjects of virtue. There is a gnawing restlessness in those who have most abandoned themselves to the power of evil; and much of the fierceness of their profligacy is ascribed to a felt necessity of keeping down, and stifling, reproachful convictions. And hence it comes to pass that vice will ordinarily feel rebuked and overawed by virtue, and that the men, whom you would think dead to all noble principle, will be disturbed by the presence of an upright and God-fearing character. The voice of righteousness will find something of an echo amid the disorder and confusion of the worst moral chaos; and the strings of conscience are scarcely ever so dislocated and torn as not to yield even a whisper, when swept by the hand of a high-virtued monitor. So that the godly in a neighbourhood wield an influence which is purely that of godliness, and, when denied opportunities of direct interference, check by example, and reprove by conduct. You could not then measure to us the consequences of the withdrawment of the salt from the mass of a population, nor calculate the rapidity with which, on the complete removal of God-fearing men,

an overwhelming corruption would pervade all society. But this is exactly what must occur, if a system, opposite to the present, were introduced, so that salvation were not a thing to be hoped and waited for. If as soon as a man were justified, through being enabled to act faith upon Christ, he were translated to the repose and blessedness of heaven, he could exert nothing of that influence, and work nothing of that benefit, which we have now traced and exhibited. And, therefore, in proportion as the influence is important and the benefit considerable, we must be warranted in maintaining it "good, that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

It is, however, the goodness of the arrangement to the individual himself which seems chiefly contemplated by the prophet; and upon this, therefore, we shall employ the remainder of our discourse. Now, under this point of view, our text is simpler at first sight than when rigidly examined. We can see, at once, that there is a spiritual discipline in the hoping and waiting, which can scarcely fail to improve greatly the character of the Christian. But, nevertheless, would it not, on the whole, be vastly for his personal advantage that he should leave speedily this theatre of conflict and trouble, and be admitted, without a wearisome delay, into the mansion which Christ has prepared for his residence? We have already shown you that there can exist no actual necessity, that he who is justified should not

be immediately glorified. We are bound to believe that a justified man—and, beyond all question, a man is justified in this life—is consigned to blessedness by an irreversible appointment, and that, consequently, whensoever he dies, it is certain that he enters into heaven. The moment he is justified, Heaven becomes undoubtedly his portion : and if, therefore, he die at the instant of justification, he will as surely obtain immortality, as if many years elapse between the out-putting of faith and the departure from life. And how then can it be good for him, certified as he thus is of heaven, to continue the war with sin and corruption, and to cut painfully his way through hosts of opponents, in place of passing instantaneously into the joy of his Lord ? If you could prove it in every case indispensable that a justified man should undergo discipline, in order to his acquiring meetness for heaven, there would be no room for debate as to the goodness asserted in our text. But you cannot prove the discipline indispensable, because we know the possibility that a man may be justified at the last moment of life ; so that, no time having been allowed for preparation, he may spring from a death-bed to a throne. And thus the question comes back upon us in its unbroken force, wherein lies the goodness of hoping and waiting for salvation ?

We take the case, for example, of a man who, at the age of thirty, is enabled, through the operations of grace, to look in faith to the Mediator. By this

looking in faith the man is justified : a justified man cannot perish : and if, therefore, the individual died at thirty, he would "sleep in Jesus." But, after being justified, the man is left thirty years upon earth—years of care, and toil, and striving with sin—and during these years he hopes and waits for salvation. At length he obtains salvation ; and thus, at the close of thirty years, takes possession of an inheritance to which his title was clear at the beginning. Now wherein can lie the advantageousness of this arrangement ? Thirty years, which might have been spent in the enjoying, are spent in the hoping and waiting for salvation : and unless the reality shall fall short of the expectation, how can it be true that "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord ?"

We think that no fair explanation can be given of our text, unless you bring into the account the difference in the portions to be assigned hereafter to the righteous. If you supposed uniformity in the glory and happiness of the future, we should be at a loss to discover the goodness of the existing arrangement. If, after the thirty years of warfare and toil, the man receive precisely what he might have received at the outset of these years, is he benefited, nay, is he not injured by the delay ? If the delay afford the means of increasing the blessedness, there is a clear advantageousness in that delay. But if the blessedness be of a fixed quantity, so that at the instant of justification a man's portion is unalterably

determined, to assert it good that he should hope and wait, is to assert that thirty years of expectation are more delightful than thirty years of possession.

We bring before you, therefore, as a comment on our text, words such as these of the Apostle, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory<sup>1</sup>." We consider that when you set the passages in juxtaposition, the working power, ascribed by one to affliction, gives satisfactory account of the goodness attributed by the other to the hoping and waiting. It is unquestionably good that a man should hope and wait, provided the delay make it possible that he heighten the amount of finally-received blessedness. And if the affliction, for example, which is undergone during the period of delay, work out "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," it follows necessarily, that delay makes possible the heightening future glory; and therefore it follows, just as necessarily, that it is "good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

We consider it easy, by thus bringing into the account an undoubted doctrine of Scripture—the doctrine that the future allotments of the righteous shall be accurately proportioned to their present attainments—to explain the goodness of an arrangement which defers, through many years, full deliverance from trial. We are here, in every sense,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 17



on a stage of probation ; so that, having once been brought back from the alienations of nature, we are candidates for a prize, and wrestlers for a diadem. It is not the mere entrance into the kingdom, for which we contend : the first instant in which we act faith on Christ as our propitiation, sees this entrance secured to us as justified beings. But, when justified, there is opened before us the widest field for a righteous ambition ; and portions deepening in majesty, and heightening in brilliancy, rise on our vision, and animate to unwearied endeavour. We count it one of the glorious things of Christianity, that, in place of repressing, it gives full scope to all the ardours of man's spirit. It is common to reckon ambition amongst vices : and a vice it is, under its ordinary developments, with which Christianity wages interminable warfare. But, nevertheless, it is a staunch, and an adventurous, and an eagle-eyed thing : and it is impossible to gaze on the man of ambition, daunted not by disaster, wearied not by repulse, disheartened not by delay, holding on in one unbroken career of effort to reach a coveted object, without feeling that he possesses the elements of a noble constitution ; and that, however to be wept over for the prostitution of his energies, for the pouring out this mightiness of soul on the corrupt and the perishable, he is equipped with an apparatus of powers which need nothing but the being rightly directed, in order to the forming the very finest of characters. And we think it nothing better than a libel on Christianity, to declare of the ambitious man,

that, if he become religious, he must, in every sense, cease to be ambitious. If it have been his ambition to rise high in the dignities of a state, to win to himself the plaudits of a multitude, to twine his forehead with the wreaths of popular favour, to be foremost amongst the heroes of war or the professors of science—the introduced humility of a disciple of Christ, bringing him down from all the heights of carnal ascendancy, will be quite incompatible with this his ambition, so that his discipleship may be tested by its suppression and destruction. But all those elements of character which went to the making up this ambition—the irrepressible desire of some imagined good, the fixedness of purpose, the strenuousness of exertion—these remain, and are not to be annihilated; requiring only the proposition of a holy object, and they will instantly be concentrated into a holy ambition. And Christianity propounds this object. Christianity deals with ambition as a passion to be abhorred and denounced, whilst urging the warrior to carve his way to a throne, or the courtier to press on in the path of preferment. But it does not cast out the elements of the passion. Why should it? They are the noblest which enter into the human composition, bearing most vividly the impress of man's original formation. Christianity seizes on these elements. She tells her subjects that the rewards of eternity, though all purchased by Christ, and none merited by man, shall be rigidly proportioned to their works. She tells them that there

are places of dignity, and stations of eminence, and crowns with more jewellery, and sceptres with more sway, in that glorious Empire which shall finally be set up by the Mediator. And she bids them strive for the loftier recompense. She would not have them contented with the lesser portion, though infinitely outdoing human imagination as well as human desert. And if ambition be the walking with the staunch step, and the single eye, and the untired zeal, and all in pursuit of some longed-for superiority, Christianity saith not to the man of ambition, lay aside thine ambition : Christianity hath need of the staunch step, and the single eye, and the untired zeal ; and she, therefore, sets before the man pyramid rising above pyramid in glory, throne above throne, palace above palace ; and she sends him forth into the moral arena to wrestle for the loftiest, though unworthy of the lowest.

We shall not hesitate to argue that in this, as in other modes which might be indicated, Christianity provides an antagonist to that listlessness which a feeling of security might be supposed to engender. She does not allow the believer to imagine every thing done, when a title to the kingdom has been obtained. She still shows him that the trials of the last great assize shall proceed most accurately on the evidence of works. There is no swerving in the Bible from this representation. And if one man become a ruler over ten cities, and another over five, and another over two—each receiving an exact pro-

portion to his improvement of talents—it is clear as demonstration can make it, that our strivings will have a vast influence on our recompense, and that, though no iota of blessedness shall be portioned out to the righteous which is not altogether an undeserved gift, the arrangements of the judgment will balance most nicely what is bestowed and what is performed. It shall not be said, that, because secure of admission into Heaven, the justified man has nothing to excite him to toil. He is to wrestle for a place amongst spirits of chief renown: he is to propose to himself a station close to the throne: he is to fix his eye on a reward sparkling above the rest with the splendours of eternity: and, whilst bowed to the dust under a sense of utter unworthiness to enter the lists in so noble a contest, he is to become competitor for the richest and most radiant of prizes. We tell him, then, that it is good that he hope and wait. It is telling him that there is yet time, though rapidly diminishing, for securing high rank in the kingdom. It is telling the wrestler, the glass is running out, and there is a garland not won. It is telling the warrior, the night-shades are gathering, and the victory is not yet complete. It is telling the traveller, the sun is declining, and there are higher peaks to be scaled. Is it not good that I hope and wait, when each moment may add a jewel to the crown, a plume to the wing, a city to the sceptre? Is it not good, when each second of effort may lift me a step higher in the scale of triumph and majesty? Oh,

you look on an individual whose faith in Christ Jesus has been demonstrated by most scriptural evidence, but unto whom life is one long series of trials, and disasters, and pains. And you are disposed to ask, seeing there can rest no doubt on the man's title to salvation, whether it would not be good for him to be freed at once from the burden of the flesh, and thus spared, it may be, yet many years of anxiety and struggle. You think that he may well take as his own the words of the Psalmist: "Oh that I had wings like a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest." But we meet you with the assertion of an instituted connexion between our two states of being. We tell you that the believer, as he breasts the storm, and plunges into the war, and grapples with affliction, is simply in the condition of one who contends for a prize; ay, and that if he were taken off from the scene of combat, just at the instant of challenging the adversary, and thus saved, on your short-sighted calculation, a superfluous outlay of toil and resistance, he would miss noble things, and things of loveliness, in his everlasting portion, and be brought down from some starry eminence in the sovereignties of eternity, which, had he fought through a long life-time "the good fight of faith<sup>1</sup>," might have been awarded him in the morning of the first resurrection.

Now we may suppose that we carry with us your admission of the fairness of the reasoning, that, inas-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 12.

much as the continuance of the justified upon earth affords them opportunity of rising higher in the scale of future blessedness, there is a goodness in the arrangement which is vastly more than a counterpoise to all the evils with which it seems charged. The justified man, translated at the instant of justification, could receive nothing, we may think, but the lower and less splendid portions. He would have had no time for glorifying God in the active duties of a Christian profession; and it would seem impossible, therefore, that he should win any of those more magnificent allotments which shall be given to the foremost of Christ's followers. But the remaining in the flesh after justification, allows of that growth in grace, that progress in holiness, that adorning in all things the doctrine of the Saviour, to which shall be awarded, at the judgment, chief places in the kingdom of Messiah. And if, on the supposition that no period intervene, there can be no augmentations of happiness, whereas, on that of hoping and waiting, there may be daily advances in holiness, and therefore daily accessions to a never-ending bliss; who will deny the accuracy of the inference, that "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord?"

There would seem nothing wanting to the completeness of this argument, unless it be proof of what has been all along assumed, namely, that the being compelled to hope and to wait is a good moral discipline, so that the exercises prescribed are calculated

to promote holiness, and, therefore, to insure happiness. We have perhaps only shown the advantageousness of delay; whereas the text asserts the advantageousness of certain acts of the soul. Yet this discrepancy between the thing proved, and the thing to be proved, is too slight to require a lengthened correction. It is the delay which makes salvation a thing of hope; and that which I am obliged to hope for, I am, of course, obliged to wait for; and thus, whatever of beneficial result can be ascribed to the delay may, with equal fitness, be ascribed to the hoping and waiting. Besides, hope and patience—for it is not the mere waiting which is asserted to be good; it is the quietly waiting; and this quiet waiting is but another term for patience—hope and patience are two of the most admirable of Christian graces, and he who cultivates them assiduously cannot well be neglectful of the rest. So that, to say of a man that he is exercising hope and patience, is to say of him, that, through the assistance of God's Spirit, he is more and more overcoming the ruggedness and oppositions of nature, and more and more improving the soil, that lovely things, and things of good report, may spring up and flourish. In the material world, there is a wonderful provision against the destruction of the soil, which has often excited the admiration of philosophers. The coat of vegetable mould with which this globe is overspread, and the removal of which would be the covering our fields with sterility, consists of loose materials, easily washed away by

the rains, and continually carried down by the rivers to the sea. And, nevertheless, though there is this rapid and ongoing waste, a waste which seems sufficient, of itself, to destroy in a few years the soil, there is no sensible diminution in the layers of mould; but the soil remains the same, or nearly the same, in quantity: and must have done so, ever since this earth became the home of animal or vegetable life. And we know, therefore, that there must be causes at work which continually furnish a supply just equal to the waste of the soil. We know that God, wonderful in his forethought and contrivance, must have arranged a system of mechanical and chemical agencies, through whose operations the ravages of the flood and storm should be carefully repaired: and we find accordingly, that, whilst the soil is swept away, there goes on continually, through the action of the elements, a breaking up and pounding even of the hardest rocks, and that thus there is strewed upon the earth's surface by the winds, or brought down in the sediments of mountain torrents, a fresh deposit in the room of the displaced and far-scattered covering.

Now it is only necessary to allude to such an arrangement in the material world, and you summon forth the admiration and applause of contemplative minds. It is a thing so surprising that the waste and loss, which the most careless must observe, should be continually and exactly repaired, though by agencies whose workings we can scarcely detect,



that the bare mention of the fact elicits, on all sides, a confession, that creative wisdom and might distance immeasurably the staunchest of our searchings. But we think that, in the spiritual economy, we have something, analogous indeed, but still more beautiful as an arrangement. The winds of passion, and the floods of temptation, pass fiercely over the soil of the heart, displacing often and scattering that mould which has been broken up by the ploughshare of the Gospel. But God's promise is that he will not suffer believers "to be tempted above that they are able<sup>1</sup>:" and thus, though the soil for a while be disturbed, it is not, as in the material system, carried altogether away, but soon resettles, and is again fit for the husbandman. But this is not all. Every overcome temptation, ministering, as it must do, to faith and hope and patience, is virtually an assault on the granite of a corrupt nature, and helps to break in pieces the rock of which there remains much in the breasts of the most pious. He who conquers a temptation takes a fresh step towards subduing himself; in other words, detaches more particles from the stone and the iron. And thus, in most accurate correspondence, as in the natural world so in the spiritual, the tempest and torrent, which displace the soil, provide fresh material for all the purposes of vegetation: but there is this difference between the two; in the natural world, the old soil disappears,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 13.

and its place is supplied by the new ; in the spiritual, the old, disturbed for a while, subsides, and is then wondrously deepened by accessions of new. Hope and patience, exercised by the appointed trials of life, cause an enrichment of the soil in which all Christian graces flourish ; so that the grain of mustard seed, bursting into a tree, finds ample space for its roots, spreading them wide and striking them deep. And if this be no exaggerated account of the benefits resulting from a sedulous exercise of hope and patience : if it be true that he who, in the scriptural sense, hopes and quietly waits for salvation, is under that discipline which, of all others, ministers to the growth of dispositions acceptable to God ; we have omitted, it would seem, no step in the required demonstration, but have collected all the elements of proof, that “it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

We would only further remark, though the statement is perhaps involved in the preceding, that the delay is good as affording time in which to glorify God. It is a spectacle which should stir all the anxieties and sympathies of a believer, that of a world which has been ransomed by bloodshedding, but which, nevertheless, is overspread with impiety and infidelity. The Christian is the man of loyalty and uprightness, forced to dwell in the assemblings of traitors. With a heart that beats true to the king of the land, he must tarry amongst those who have thrown off allegiance. On all sides he must

hear the plottings of treason, and behold the actings of rebellion. Can he fail to be wrought up to a longing, and effort, to arrest, in some degree, the march of anarchy, and to bring beneath the sceptre of righteousness the revolted and ruined population? Can he be an indifferent and cold-hearted spectator of the despite done to God by every class of society; and shall there be no throbbing of spirit, and no yearning of soul, over thousands of his race, who, though redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, are preparing themselves a heritage of fire and shame? We do but reason from the most invariable and well-known principles of our nature, when we argue that, as a loyal and loving subject of Christ, the believer must glow with righteous indignation at the bold insults offered to his Lord, and long to bend every faculty and power to the diminishing the world's wretchedness by overcoming its rebellion. What stronger proof then can you ask of the goodness in question than that, whilst detained from glory, we may withstand impiety? It is yet a little while, and we shall be withdrawn from this scene of rebellion; and no further effort, so far as we ourselves are concerned, can be made towards advancing Christ's kingdom. Others may come after us, of warmer loyalty and more resolute zeal, and make better head against the tide of apostasy. But our own opportunities of vindicating Christ's honour, and extending the sway of his sceptre, will have altogether passed away; and the last glance which our spirits, in de-

parting, cast upon this earth, may show us impiety careering with as dominant a footstep as ever, and send us into God's presence with a throb of self-reproach at the paucity and poverty of our resistances to the might of the evil one. We doubt not that, whatever the joy and peace of a Christian's deathbed, there will be always a feeling of regret that so little has been done, or rather so little attempted, for Christ. And if, whilst his firmament is glowing with the dawns of eternity, and the melody of angels is just stealing on his ear, and the walls of the bright city are bounding his horizon, one wish could detain him in the tabernacle of flesh; oh, it would not be the wish of tarrying with the weeping ones who are clustered at his bedside; and it would not be that of providing for children, of superintending their education, or of perfecting some plan for their settlement in life—he knows that there is a husband of the widow, and a father of the fatherless—and the only wish which could put a check on his spirit, as the plumes of its wing just feel the free air, it is that he might toil a little longer for Christ, and do at least some fractions more of his work, ere ushered into the light of his presence. And if the sinking energies were suddenly recruited, so that the pulse of the expiring man beat again vigorously; it might at first seem painful to him to be snatched back from glory; but remembering, that, whilst vice is enthroned on the high places of the earth, and millions bow down to the stock and the stone, there is a

mighty demand for all the strenuousness of the righteous, he would use returning strength in uttering the confession, it is good that I yet hope and wait for salvation.

Now in winding up this subject of discourse, we have only to remark that religion gives a character to hope of which otherwise it is altogether destitute. You will scarcely find the man, in all the ranges of our creation, whose bosom bounds not at the mention of hope. What is hope but the solace and stay of those whom it most cheats and deludes; whispering of health to the sick-man, and of better days to the dejected; the fairy name on which young imaginations pour forth all the poetry of their souls, and whose syllables float, like aerial music, into the ear of frozen and paralyzed age? In the long catalogue of human griefs there is scarce one of so crushing a pressure that hope loses its elasticity, becoming unable to soar, and bring down fresh and fair leaves from some far-off domain which itself creates. And yet, whilst hope is the great inciter to exertion, and the great soother of wretchedness, who knows not that it ordinarily deceives mankind, and that, though it crowd the future with glorious resting-places, and thus tempt us to bear up a while against accumulated disasters, its palaces and gardens vanish as we approach; and we are kept from despair, only because the pinnacles and forests of another bright scene fringe the horizon, and the deceiver finds us willing to be yet again deceived?

Hope is a beautiful meteor: but, nevertheless, this meteor, like the rainbow, is not only lovely because of its seven rich and radiant stripes; it is the memorial of a covenant between man and his Maker, telling us that we are born for immortality, destined, unless we sepulchre our greatness, to the highest honour and noblest happiness. Hope proves man deathless. It is the struggle of the soul, breaking loose from what is perishable, and attesting her eternity. And when the eye of the mind is turned upon Christ, "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification<sup>1</sup>," the unsubstantial and deceitful character is taken away from hope: hope is one of the prime pieces of that armour of proof in which the believer is arrayed; for St. Paul bids us take "for an helmet the hope of salvation<sup>2</sup>." It is not good that a man hope for wealth, since "riches profit not in the day of wrath<sup>3</sup>:" and it is not good that he hope for human honours, since the mean and mighty go down to the same burial: but it is good that he hope for salvation; the meteor then gathers, like a golden halo, round his head, and, as he presses forward in the battle-time, no weapon of the evil one can pierce through that helmet.

It is good, then, that he hope: it is good also that he quietly wait. There is much promised in Scripture to the waiting upon God. Men wish an immediate answer to prayer, and think themselves for-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 25.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. v. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Prov. xi. 4.

gotten unless the reply be instantaneous. It is a great mistake. The delay is often part, and the best part, of the answer. It exercises faith, and hope, and patience; and what better thing can be done for us than the strengthening those graces to whose growth shall be proportioned the splendours of our immortality? It is good, then, that ye wait. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint<sup>1</sup>." And ye must, according to the phrase of our text, wait for God. "The Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him<sup>2</sup>." And if the time seem long, and, worn down with affliction and wearied with toil, ye feel impatient for the moment of full emancipation; remember ye—and let the remembrance check every murmur—that God leaves you upon earth in order that, advancing in holiness, you may secure yourselves a higher grade amongst the children of the first resurrection. Strive ye, therefore, to "let patience have her perfect work<sup>3</sup>." It is "yet a little while, and he that shall come will come<sup>4</sup>." Be ye not disheartened; for "the night is far spent, the day is at hand<sup>5</sup>." As yet there has been no day to this creation, since rebellion wove the sackcloth into the overhead canopy. But the day comes onward. There is that

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xl. 31.<sup>2</sup> Ibid. xxx. 18.<sup>3</sup> James i. 4.<sup>4</sup> Heb. x. 37.<sup>5</sup> Rom xiii. 12.

edge of gold on the snow-mountains of a long-darkened world, which marks the ascending of the sun in his strength. "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, the morning cometh and also the night<sup>1</sup>." Strange that morning and night should come hand in hand. But the morning to the righteous, as bringing salvation, shall be the night to the wicked, as bringing destruction. On then, still on, lest the morning break, ere hoping and waiting have wrought their intent. Who will sleep, when, as he slumbers, bright things glide by, which, if wakeful, he might have added to his portion? Who will put off the armour, when, by stemming the battle-tide, he may gather, every instant, spoil and trophies for eternity? Who will tamper with carnal indulgences, when, for the poor enjoyment of a second, he must barter some everduring privilege? Wrestle, strive, fight, as men who "know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord<sup>2</sup>." Ye cannot indeed merit advancement. What is called reward will be the reward of nothing but God's work within you, and, therefore, be a gift most royal and gratuitous. But whilst there is the strongest instituted connexion between attainment here and enjoyment hereafter, we need not pause upon terms, but may summon you to holiness by the certainties of happiness. The Judge of mankind cometh, bringing with him rewards all wonderfully

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xxi. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 58.



glorious; but nevertheless “one star differeth from another star in glory<sup>1</sup>.” O God, it were an overwhelming mercy, and a magnificent portion, if we should obtain the least; but since thou dost invite, yea, command, us to “strive for masteries,” we will struggle—thy grace being our strength—for the higher and more beautiful.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 41.

## SERMON XI.

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TRUTH AS IT IS IN JESUS.

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EPHESIANS iv. 20, 21.

“ But ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

THERE is a singular verse in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which appears directed against a common, though perhaps unsuspected error. “ Say not thou what is the cause that the former days were better than these ; for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this <sup>1</sup>. ” We believe that there exists a disposition in persons, and especially in old persons, to set present years in contrast with past, and to prove, from the comparison, a great and ongoing deterioration in the character of mankind. And it is quite certain, that, if this disposition were observable in Solomon’s days, as well as in our own, it must pass ordinarily as the mark of a jaundiced and ill-judging mind. If it have been true in some ages, it cannot have been in all, that the moral aspect of the times has grown

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. vii. 10.

gradually darker. We must be warranted, therefore, in ascribing a disposition which has subsisted through days of improvement, as well as of declension, to a peevish determination to find fault, and not to a sober sitting in judgment upon matters of fact.

But the workings of the very same disposition may be traced under other and less obvious forms. We believe, for example, that men are often inclined to compare the religious advantages of the earlier and later days of Christianity, and to uphold the superiority of the past to the present. It is imagined, that to have been numbered amongst the living when Jesus sojourned upon earth, to have been permitted to behold the miracles which he wrought, and to hear from his own lips the truths of redemption—it is imagined, we say, that there must have been in this a privilege ampler in dimensions than any which falls to men of later generations. And from such imagining there will spring often a kind of excusing whether of infidelity, or of lukewarmness; our not believing at all, or our believing only languidly, being accounted for on the principle, that the evidence afforded is far less than might have been vouchsafed. Thus under a specious, but more dangerous aspect, we are met again by the question, “What is the cause that the former days were better than these?”

Now we believe the question to be grounded altogether on mistake. If there be advantage on

one side as contrasted with the other, we are persuaded that it lies with the present generation, and not with the past. It is true that the exhibition of miraculous energies, which was made in the cities of Judea, gave what ought to have been overwhelming attestation to the divinity of the mission of Jesus. If we possessed not the records of history to assure us of the contrary, we might be disposed to conclude, with much appearance of fairness, that they who beheld diseases scattered, and death mastered, by a word, must have instantly followed Him who wrought out the marvels. Yet we may easily certify ourselves, that the Jew was occupied by prejudices which must have more than counterbalanced his peculiar advantages. He had before him, so to speak, a sketch of his Messiah, whose accuracy he never thought of questioning; and if a claimant of the Messiahship presented not the features which were foremost in this sketch, then almost as a matter of course, his pretensions were rejected with scorn. It is nothing to say that ancient prophecy, more thoroughly investigated, might have taught the Jew the error of expecting, on the first advent of Messiah, a temporal prince and deliverer. The error was so engrained into his spirit, that it was easier for him to refer miracles to the power of the evil one, than to suspect that he harboured a false expectation. So that, when we compare our own circumstances with those of the Jew, it behoves us to remember that, if we have not his advantages in supernatural

manifestations, neither have we his disadvantages in national prepossessions. We are not to argue the effect produced upon him, from that which might now be produced upon us, by the working of miracles. In his case every feeling which results from early association or from the business of education, was enlisted against Christianity ; whereas it may almost be affirmed, that in our case, every such feeling is on the side of Christianity. If, therefore, we allowed that the testimony, which we possess to the truth of our religion, wears not outwardly the same mightiness as that afforded in the days of the Saviour, we should still contend that the predisposing circumstances in our own case far more than compensate the sensible witness in that of the Jew.

We may yet further observe, that not only are our disadvantages less, but, on a stricter examination, our advantages will appear greater. We may think there would have been a vast advantage in seeing Jesus work miracles : but, after all, we could only have believed that he actually worked them. And if we can once certify ourselves of this fact, we occupy, in the strictest sense, the same position as though we had been spectators of the wonder. It would be altogether childish to maintain, that I may not be just as certain of a thing which I have not seen, as of another which I have seen. Who is in any degree less confident, that there was once such a king as Henry the Eighth on the throne of these realms, than that there is now such a king as William the

Fourth? Or is there one of us who thinks that he would have felt more sure of there having been such a king as Henry the Eighth, had he lived in the times of that monarch in place of the present? We hold then the supposition to be indefensible, that the spectator of a miracle has necessarily an advantage over those who only hear of that miracle. Let there be clear and unequivocal testimony to the fact of the miracle having been wrought, and the spectator and the hearer stand well-nigh on a par. That there should be belief in the fact, is the highest result which can, in either case, be produced. But assuredly this result may as well be effected by the power of authenticated witness, as by the machinery of our senses. And without question, the testimony to the truth of Christianity is of so growing a character, and each age, as it rolls away, pays in so large a contribution to the evidences of faith, that it were easy to prove, that the men of the present generation gain rather than lose, by distance from the first erection of the cross. It is saying but little, to affirm that we have as good grounds of persuasion that Jesus came from God, as we should have had if permitted to behold the mighty workings of his power. We are bold to say that we have even better grounds. The testimony of our senses, however convincing for the moment, is of so fleeting and unsubstantial a character, that a year or two after we had seen a miracle, we might be brought to question whether there had not been jugglery in the

worker or credulity in ourselves. If we found a nation up in arms, maintaining that there might have been magic or trickery, but that there had not been supernatural power ; we might, perchance, be easily borne down by the outcry, if the remembered witness of our eyesight were all to which appeal could be made. It is not difficult to begin to suspect ourselves in the wrong, when we find no one willing to allow us in the right. And we therefore maintain, that, living as we do in a day when generation after generation has sat in assize on Christianity, and registered a verdict that it has God for its author, we possess the very largest advantages over those who saw with their own eyes what Jesus did, and heard with their own ears what Jesus said.

Now you may not all readily perceive the connexion of these remarks with the passage of Scripture on which we purpose to meditate. Yet the connexion is of the strictest. The apostle addresses himself to converts, who, like ourselves, had not been privileged to behold the Saviour of mankind. Christ Jesus had not walked the streets of Ephesus : and if it be supposable that certain of the inhabitants of that idolatrous city had visited Judea, during the period of his sojourning on earth, it is incredible that the Ephesian church, as a body, had enjoyed with Him personal communion. Does then St. Paul address the Ephesians as though disadvantaged by this circumstance ? Does he represent them as less favoured than their brethren of Jerusalem who had

lived within the circles of Christ's ministrations? On the contrary, you would judge from the style of his address, that he wrote this Epistle to Jewish, and not to heathen converts. He speaks to the Ephesians of their having heard Christ, and of their having been taught by Christ. "If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him." And what shall we gather from this, but a rigid confirmation of our foregoing remarks; a strengthening of the opinion, that those who have not seen may stand in precisely the same position as those who have; and that, consequently, the absence of what may be called sensible proof furnishes no groundwork of complaint, that "the former days were better than these?"

We must, indeed, allow that the Ephesians were brought, more nearly than ourselves, into personal contact with Christ, because instructed by teachers who had seen the Saviour in the flesh. Yet as soon as testimony ceases to be the testimony of senses, and becomes that of witnesses, there is an identification of the circumstances of men of former times, and of latter. Whether the testimony be transmitted through one, or through many; whether we receive it from those who themselves saw the Saviour, or from those who have taken the facts on the witness of others; there is the same distinction between such testimony, and that resulting from being actual spectators, or actual auditors: and it might, therefore, be said to us, as well as to the Ephesians, ye



have heard Christ, and ye have been taught by Christ.

But the portion of our text on which we would fix mainly your attention is the description of truth as made known by revelation. The teaching whereof the Ephesians had been the subjects, and which, therefore, we are bound to consider imparted to ourselves, is expressly stated to be "as the truth is in Jesus." Now this is a singular definition of truth, and well worth your closest attention. We hold it unquestionable, that, long ere Christ came into the world, much of truth, yea, of solid and illustrious truth, had been detected by the unaided searchings of mankind. We should not think that any advantage were gained to the cause of revelation, if we succeeded in demonstrating, that over the whole face of our planet, with the lonely exception of the narrow province of Judea, there had rested, previously to the birth of the Redeemer, a darkness altogether impenetrable. We are quite ready to allow, that, where the full blaze was not made visible, glimmerings and sparklings were caught; so that, if upon no point, connected with futurity, perfect information were obtained, upon many points a degree of intelligence was reached which should not be overlooked in our estimate of heathenism. We think it right to assert, under certain limitations, that man, whilst left to himself, dug fragments of truth from the mighty quarry; though we know that he possessed not the ability of fashioning com-

pletely the statue, nor even of combining into symmetry the detached portions brought up by his oft-renewed strivings. We do not, therefore, suppose it implied in the expression of our text, that truth was unknown amongst men until, having been taught by the Redeemer, it might be designated "truth as it is in Jesus." On the contrary, we are persuaded that the Ephesians, however shut out from the advantages of previous revelations, possessed many elements of moral truth before Christ's apostles appeared in their city. Hence, the definition of our text implies not, that, out of Jesus, there were no discoverable manifestations of truth; but rather that truth, when seen in and through Jesus, assumes new and distinguishing features. And it is upon this fact we desire, on the present occasion, to turn the main of your attention. We admit that certain portions of Christ's teaching related to truths which were not then, for the first time, made known to mankind. Other portions either involved new disclosures, or brought facts into notice which had been strangely and fatally overlooked. But whether the truth were new or old, the circumstance of its being truth "as it is in Jesus" gave it an aspect, and a character, which it would never have assumed, if communicated through another channel than the Mediator. Such we hold to be the drift of the expression. It becomes, then, our business to endeavour to prove that "truth as it is in Jesus," puts on a clothing, or a colouring, derived from the Redeemer;

so that if you separate truth from him who is "the way, the truth, and the life<sup>1</sup>," it shall seem practically a different thing from itself when connected with this glorious personage.

Now we shall take truth under two principal divisions, and compare it as "it is in Jesus" with what it is out of Jesus. We shall refer, first, to those truths which have to do with God's nature and character; secondly, to those which have to do with man's condition. There may be, indeed, many minor departments of moral truth. But we think that these two great divisions include most, if not all, of the lesser.

We turn then, first, to the truths which have to do with the nature and character of God. We begin with the lowest element of truth, namely, that there is a great First Cause, through whose agency hath arisen the fair and costly fabric of the visible universe. We have here a truth, which, under some shape or another, has been recognised and held in every age, and by every nation. Barbarism and civilisation have had to do with peculiar forms and modifications of this truth. But neither the rude processes of the one, nor the attenuating of the other, have availed to produce its utter banishment from the earth. However various the tribes into which the human race hath been broken, the phenomenon has never existed of a nation of Atheists. The voyagers who have passed over

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 6.

waters which had never been ploughed by the seaman, and lighted upon islands whose loneliness had shut them out from the knowledge and companionship of other districts of the globe, have found always, amid the savage and secluded inhabitants, the notion of some invisible being, great in his power and awful in his vengeance. We cannot, therefore, in any sense maintain, that the truth of the existence of a God was undiscovered truth, so long as it was not "truth as it is in Jesus." Christ came not to teach what natural, or rather traditional, religion was capable of teaching; though he gave sanctions to its lessons, of which, heretofore, they had been altogether destitute. But take the truth of the existence of a God as it is out of Jesus, and then take that truth as it is in Jesus, and let us see whether, in the two cases, the same truth will not bear very different aspects.

We know it to be said of Christ by St. Paul, that he was "the image of the invisible God<sup>1</sup>." It seems to us that the sense, in which Christ is the image, is akin to that, in which he is the word, of the Almighty. What speech is to thought, that is the incarnate Son to the invisible Father. Thought is a viewless thing. It can traverse space, and run to and fro through creation, and pass instantaneously from one extreme of the scale of being to the other; and, all the while, there is no power in my fellow-men to discern the careerings of this mys-

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 15.

terious agent. But speech is manifested thought. It is thought embodied ; made sensible, and palpable, to those who could not apprehend it in its secret and silent expatiations. And precisely what speech thus effects in regard to thought, the incarnate Son effected in regard to the invisible Father. The Son is the manifested Father, and, therefore, fitly termed "the Word:" the relation between the incarnate Son and the Father being accurately that between speech and thought ; the one exhibiting and setting forth the other. It is in somewhat of a similar sense that Christ may be termed "the image of the invisible God." "God is a Spirit<sup>1</sup>." Of this Spirit the creation is every where full, and the loneliest and most secluded spot is occupied by its presence. Nevertheless, we can discern little of the universal goings-forth of this Deity. There are works above us, and around us, which present tokens of his wisdom and supremacy. But these, after all, are only feeble manifestations of his more illustrious attributes. Nay, they leave those attributes well-nigh wholly unrevealed. I cannot learn God's holiness from the stars or the mountains. I cannot read his faithfulness in the ocean or the cataract. Even his wisdom, and power, and love, are but faintly portrayed in the torn and disjointed fragments of this fallen creation. And seeing, therefore, that Deity, invisible as to his essence, can become visible as to his attributes only through some direct manifesta-

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 24.

tion not found in his material workmanship, God sent his well-beloved Son to assume our flesh; and this Son, exhibiting in and through his humanity as much of his divine properties as creatureship could admit, became unto mankind "the image of the invisible God." He did not, in strict matter-of-fact, reveal to mankind that there is a God. But he made known to them, most powerfully, and most abundantly, the nature and attributes of God. The beams of divinity, passing through his humanity as through a softening medium, shone upon the earth with a lustre sufficiently tempered to allow of their irradiating, without scorching and consuming. And they who gazed on this mysterious person, moving in his purity, and his benevolence, through the lines of a depraved and scornful population, saw not indeed God—"for no man hath seen God at any time<sup>1</sup>," and spirit must necessarily evade the searchings of sense—but they saw God imaged with the most thorough fidelity, and his every property embodied, so far as the immaterial can discover itself through the material.

Now we think you can scarcely fail to perceive, that if you detach the truth of the being of a God from Jesus, and if you then take this truth "as it is in Jesus," the difference in aspect is almost a difference in the truth itself. Apart from revelation, I can believe that there is a God. I look upon the wonder-workings by which I am encompassed ;

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 12.

and I must sacrifice all that belongs to me as a rational creature, if I espouse the theory that chance has been parent to the splendid combinations. But what can be more vague, what more indefinite, than those notions of Deity which reason, at the best, is capable of forming? The evil which is mixed with good in the creation; the disordered appearances which seem to mark the absence of a supreme and vigilant government; the frequent triumph of wickedness, and the correspondent depression of virtue; these, and the like stern and undeniable mysteries, will perplex me in every attempt to master satisfactorily the Unity of Godhead. But let me regard Jesus as making known to me God, and straightway there succeeds a calm to my confused and unsettled imaginings. He tells me by his words, and shows me by his actions, that all things are at the disposal of one eternal and inscrutable Creator. Putting forth superhuman ability alike in the bestowment of what is good, and in the removal of what is evil, he furnishes me with the strictest demonstration that there are not two principles which can pretend to hold sway in the universe; but that God, a being without rival and alone in his majesties, created whatsoever is good, and permitted whatsoever is evil.

Thus the truth, the foundation truth, of the existence of a God, takes the strength, and the complexion, of health, only in the degree that it is truth "as it is in Jesus." Men laboured and

struggled hard to reach the doctrine of the unity of Godhead. But philosophy, with all the splendour of its discoveries, could never banish Polytheism from the earth. It was reserved for Christianity to establish a truth which, now, we are disposed to class amongst the elements of even natural theology. And when you contrast the belief in the existence of Deity which obtained generally before the coming of Christ, with that established wheresoever the Gospel gains footing as a communication from heaven; the one, a belief in many gods; the other, a belief in one God—the first, therefore, a belief from which reason herself now instinctively recoils; the second, a belief which carries on its front the dignity and beauty of a sublime moral fact—why, you will all quickly admit that the truth of the existence of God, as it is out of Jesus, differs, immeasurably, from that same truth, “as it is in Jesus;” and you will thus grant the accuracy of the proposition now under review, namely, that truth becomes, practically, new truth, and effective truth, by being truth “as it is in Jesus.”

Now, so far as natural theology is concerned, we derive, ordinarily, the truth of the existence of God from the curious and mighty workmanship of the visible creation. We conclude that a great intelligent cause must have spread out this panorama of grandeur, and loveliness, and contrivance. But let us deal with the truth, that God built the worlds, just as with the other truth of there being a God.



Let us take it out of Jesus, and then let us take it in Jesus.

It is a vast deal easier for the mind to push onward into what is to come, than backward into what is past. Let a thing exist, and we can, in a certain sense, master the thought of its existence being indefinitely continued. But if, in searching out the beginnings of its existence, we can find no period at which it was not, then presently the mind is confounded, and the idea is too vast for its most giantlike grapplings. This is exactly the case with regard to the Godhead. We are able, comparatively speaking, to take in the truth, that God shall never cease to be. But we have no capacity whatsoever for this other truth, that God hath always been. I could go back a thousand ages, or a million ages, ay, or a thousand millions of ages; and though the mind might be wearied with traversing so vast a district of time, yet if I then reached a point where pausing I might say, here Deity began, here Godhead first rose into being, the worn spirit would recruit itself, and feel that the end compensated the toil of the journeying. But it is the being unable to assign any beginning; rather, it is the knowing that there never was beginning; this it is, we say, which hopelessly distances every finite intelligence; the most magnificent, but certainly, at the same time, the most overpowering truth, being that He, at whose word the universe commenced, knew never himself a moment of commencement.

Now the necessity under which we thus lie of ascribing beginning to God's works, but not to God himself, forces on us the contemplation of a period when no worlds had started into being, and space, in its infinite circuits, was full only of the Eternal One. And then comes the question, as to the design and purpose of Deity in peopling with systems the majestic solitude, and surrounding himself with various orders of creatures. We confess, in all its breadth, the truth that God made the worlds. But the mind passes instantly on to the inquiry, why, and wherefore did He make them?

And if you take the truth of the creation of the universe out of Jesus, there is nothing but vague answer to give to such inquiry. We may think that God's benevolence craved dependent objects over which it might pour its solitudes. We may imagine that there was such desire of companionship, even in Deity, that it pleased not the Creator to remain longer alone. But we must not forget, that, in assigning such reasons, we verge to the error of supposing a void in the happiness of God, the filling-up of which tasked the energies of his Almightyness. In answering a question, we are bound to take heed that we originate not others far more difficult of solution.

We take, then, the truth of the creation "as it is in Jesus," and we will see whether it assume not very different features from those worn by it, as it is out of Jesus. We learn from the testimony of

St. Paul, that "all things were created by Christ, and for Christ<sup>1</sup>." We would fix attention to this latter fact, "all things were created for Christ." We gather from this fact that the gorgeous structure of materialism, spreading interminably above us and around us, is nothing more than an august temple, reared for consecration to the Mediator's glory. "All things were created for Christ." You ask me why God spangled the firmament with stars, and paved with worlds the expansions of an untravelled immensity, and poured forth the rich endowment of life on countless myriads of multiform creatures. And I tell you, that, if you debar me from acquaintance with "God manifest in the flesh<sup>2</sup>," I may give you in reply some brilliant guess, or dazzling conjecture, but nothing that will commend itself to thoughtful and well-disciplined minds. But the instant that I am brought into contact with revelation, and can associate creation with Christ, as alike its author and object, I have an answer which is altogether free from the vagueness of speculation. I can tell you that the star twinkles not on the measureless expanse, and that the creature moves not on any one of those worlds whose number outruns our arithmetic, which hath not been created for the manifestation of Christ's glory, and the advancement of Christ's purposes. We may not be able to define, with accuracy, the sublime ends which shall yet be attained, when evil

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

is expelled from this long-defiled section of the universe. We know only, that though an infidel world is banishing Christ from its councils, and the ranks of the blasphemers are leaguings to sweep away his name, and the scoffers are insolently asking "where is the promise of his coming<sup>1</sup>;" he shall descend with the cloud and the hurricane as his heraldry, and, circled with the magnificent sternness of celestial battle, turn the theatre of his humiliation into the theatre of his triumphs. Then—when "the spirits of just men made perfect<sup>2</sup>" shall have entered into their raised and glorified bodies; and when the splendid and rejoicing multitude shall walk forth on the new earth, and be canopied with the new heavens—Christ shall emphatically "see of the travail of his soul<sup>3</sup>;" and then, from every field of immensity, crowded with admiring spectators, shall there roll in the ecstatic acknowledgment, "worthy, worthy, worthy, is the Lamb." But, without descending to particulars, we may assert it unequivocally proved by sundry declarations of the Bible, that suns, and planets, and angels, and men, the material creation with its walls and domes and columns, and the immaterial with its train upon train of lofty spirits—all these constitute one vast apparatus for effecting a mighty enthronement of Jesus of Nazareth. And if you recur to the work of contrast in which we are engaged; if you compare the truth of creation

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah liii. 11.

as it is out of Jesus with that same truth as it is in Jesus; then, when you observe that, in the one case, the mind has nothing of a resting-place—that it can only wander over the fields which God hath strewed with his wonders, confounded by the lustre without divining the intention—whereas, in the other, each star, each system, each human, each celestial being, fills some place in a mechanism which is working out the noble result of the coronation of Christ as Lord of all; why, we feel that the assent of every one in this assembly must be won to the position, that old truth becomes well-nigh new truth by being truth “as it is in Jesus.”

But we wish to set before you yet simpler illustrations of the matter which we are engaged in demonstrating. The point we have in hand is the showing that truths, which refer to God's character, must be viewed in connexion with Jesus, in order to their being rightly understood, or justly appreciated. We have endeavoured to substantiate this, so far as the nature and works of the Almighty are concerned. Let us turn, however, for a few moments, to his attributes, and we shall find our position greatly corroborated.

We take, for example, the justice of God. We might obtain, independently on the scheme of redemption, a definite and firm-built persuasion, that God is a just God, taking cognizance of the transgressions of his creatures. We do not, then, so refer to the sacrifice of Christ for proof of God's justice,

as though no proof could be elsewhere obtained. The God of natural religion must be a God to whom sundry perfections are ascribed; and amongst such perfections justice will find, necessarily, a place. But we argue that the demonstration of theory will never commend itself to men's minds like the demonstration of practice. There might have come to us a revelation from heaven ushered in with incontrovertible witness; and this revelation might have stated, in language the boldest and most unqualified, that God's justice could overlook no iota of offence, and dispense with no tittle of punishment. But, had we been left without a vivid exhibition of the workings of this justice, we should perpetually have softened down the statements of the word, and argued that, in all probability, far more was said than ever would be done. We should have reasoned up from human enactments to divine; and finding that the former are oftentimes far larger in the threatening than in the exaction, have concluded that the latter might, at last, exhibit the like inequality.

Now if we would deliver the truth of God's justice from these misapprehensions, whether wilful or accidental, what process, we ask of you, lies at our disposal? It is quite useless to try abstract reasoning. The mind can evade it, and the heart has no concern with it. It will avail nothing to insist on the literal force of expressions. The whole mischief lies in the questioning the thorough putting into effect; in the doubting whether what is denounced shall be

point by point inflicted. What then shall we do with this truth of God's justice? We reply, we must make it truth "as it is in Jesus." We send a man at once to the cross of Christ. We bid him gaze on the illustrious and mysterious victim, stooping beneath the amazing burden of human transgression. We ask him whether he think there was remission of penalty on behalf of Him, who, though clothed in humanity, was one with Deity; or that the vials of wrath were spoiled of any of their scalding drops, ere emptied on the Surety of our alienated tribes? We ask him whether the agonies of the garden, and the terrors of the crucifixion, furnish not a sufficient and thrilling demonstration, that God's justice, when it takes in hand the exaction of punishment, does the work thoroughly; so that no bolt is too ponderous to be driven into the soul, no offence too minute to be set down in the reckoning? And if, when the sword of justice awoke against the fellow of the Almighty, it returned not to the scabbard till bathed in the anguish of the sufferer; and if God's hatred of sin be so intense and overwhelming a thing, that, ere transgressors could be received into favour, the Eternal Son interposed, and humbled himself so that angels drew back confounded, and endured vicariously such extremity of wretchedness that the earth reeled at the spectacle, and the heavens were darkened; why, shall there, or can there be harbourage of the deceitful expectation, that if any one of us, the sons of the apostate, rush

on the bosses of the buckler of the Lord, and make trial for himself of the justice of the Almighty, he shall not find that justice as strict in its works as it is stern in its words, prepared to deal out to him, unsparingly and unflinchingly, the fiery portion whose threatenings glare from the pages of Scripture? So then we may count it legitimate to maintain, that the truth of God being a just God is appreciated truth, and effective truth, only in the degree that it is truth "as it is in Jesus;" and we add, consequently, new witness to the fact, that the definition of our text describes truth accurately under its influential and life-giving forms.

We may pursue much the same line of argument in reference to the truth of the love of God. We may confess, that he who looks not at this attribute through the person and work of the Mediator, may obtain ideas of it which shall, in certain respects, be correct. And yet, after all, it would be hard to prove satisfactorily, by natural theology, that "God is love<sup>1</sup>." There may be a kind of poetical, or Arcadian divinity, drawn from the brightness of sunshine, and the rich enamel of flowers, and the deep dark blue of a sleeping lake. And, taking the glowing landscape as their page of theology, men may sketch to themselves God unlimited in his benevolence. But when the sunshine is succeeded by the darkness, and the flowers are withered, and

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 8.



the waters wrought into madness, can they find in the wrath and devastation that assurance of God's love which they derive, unhesitatingly, from the calm and the beauty? The matter-of-fact we hold to be, that Natural Theology, at the best, is a system of uncertainties, a balancing of opposites. I should draw different conclusions from the genial breathings of one day, and the desolating simoon of the next. And though when I had thrown me down on an alpine summit, and looked forth on the clusterings of the grand and the lovely, canopied with an azure that was full of glory; a hope, that my Creator loved me, might have been gathered from scenery teeming with impresses of kindness, and apparently sending out from waving forests, and gushing fountains, and smiling villages, the anthem of an acknowledgment that God is infinitely beneficent; yet if, on a sudden, there passed around me the rushings of the hurricane, and there came up from the valleys the shrieks of an affrighted peasantry, and the torrents went down in their strength, sweeping away the labour of man's hands, and the corn and the wood which had crowned the fields as a diadem; oh, the confidence which had been given me by an exhibition which appeared eloquent of the benevolence of Godhead, would yield to horror and trepidation, whilst the Eternal One seemed walking before me, the tempest his voice, and the lightning his glance, and a fierce devastation in his every footprint.

But even allowing the idea gained, that "God

is love," there is no property of the Creator concerning which it is easier to fall into mistake. We have no standard by which to estimate divine affections, unless one which we fashion out of the results of the workings of human. And we know well enough, that, amongst ourselves, an intense and overweening attachment is almost sure to blind man to the faults of its object, or to cause, at the least, that when the faults are discerned, due blame is withheld. So that, whilst we have not before us a distinct exhibition of God's love, we may fall naturally into the error of ascribing an effeminate tenderness to the Almighty, and reckon, exactly in proportion as we judge the love amazing, that it will never permit our being given over to torment. Hence admitting it to be truth, yea, most glorious and blessed truth, that the creature is loved by the Creator, this truth must be viewed through a rectifying medium, which shall correct the distortions which a depraved nature produces.

Now we maintain again that this rectifying medium must be the person and work of a Saviour. In other words, we must make the truth of God's love, truth "as it is in Jesus," and then, at one and the same time, we shall know how ample is the love, and be guarded against abusing it. When we observe that God loved us so well as to give his Son to death for us, we perceive that the immenseness of this love leaves imagination far behind in her least-fettered soarings. But when we also observe that

love so unheard-of, could not advance straight to the rescue of its objects, but must wait, ere it could breathe words of forgiveness to the fallen, the out-workings of a task of ignominy and blood; there must vanish, at once, the idle expectancy of a tenderness not proof against the cry of despair, and we must learn (unless we wilfully close the mind against conviction) that the love of a holy, and righteous, and immutable Being is that amazing principle, which can stir the universe on our behalf during the season of grace, and yet, as soon as that season have terminated, resign us unhesitatingly to the ministry of vengeance. Thus, take the truth of God's love out of Jesus, and you will dress up a weak and womanish sympathy, which cannot permit the punishment of the disobedient. But, on the other hand, take this truth "as it is in Jesus," and you have the love immeasurable in its stature, but uncompromising in its penalties; eager to deliver the meanest who repents, yet nerved to abandon the thousands who die hardened; threatening, therefore, the obdurate in the very degree that it encourages the penitent: and when you thus contrast truth "as it is in Jesus," with truth as it is out of Jesus, you will more and more recognize the power and the worth of the expression, that the Ephesians had been taught "as the truth is in Jesus."

We might employ this kind of illustration in regard to other attributes of God. We might show you that correct and practical views of the truths of

God's faithfulness, God's holiness, God's wisdom, are only to be derived from the work of redemption; and this would be showing you that truth must be truth "as it is in Jesus," if we would acquaint ourselves with the character of God. But we waive the further prosecution of our first head of discourse, and ask attention to a few remarks which have to do with the second.

We divided truth into two great departments; truth which relates to the character of God, truth which relates to the condition of man. We proceed, therefore, to affirm, in reference to the condition of man, that truth, if rightly understood, or thoroughly influential, must be truth "as it is in Jesus." We find it admitted, for example, in most quarters, that man is a fallen being, with faculties weakened, if not wholly incapacitated for moral achievement. Yet this general admission is one of the most heartless, and unmeaning things in the world. It consists with the harbouring pride and conceit. It tolerates many forms and actings of self-righteousness. And the matter-of-fact is, that man's moral disability is not to be described, and not understood theoretically. We want some bold, definite, and tangible measurements. But we shall find these only in the work of Christ Jesus. I learn the depth to which I have sunk, from the length of the chain let down to updraw me. I ascertain the mightiness of the ruin by examining the machinery of restoration. I gather that I must be, in the

broadest sense, unable to effect deliverance for myself, from observing that none less than the Son of the Highest had strength enough to fight the battles of our race. Thus the truth of human apostasy, of human corruption, of human helplessness—how shall this be understood truth and effective? We answer, simply through being truth “as it is in Jesus.” In the history of the Incarnation and Crucifixion we read, in characters not to be misinterpreted, the announcements, that man has destroyed himself, and that, whatever his original powers, he is now void of ability to turn unto God, and do things well-pleasing in his sight. You do not, indeed, alter these truths, if you destroy all knowledge of the Incarnation and Crucifixion. But you remove their massive and resistless exhibition, and leave us to our own vague and partial computations. We have nothing practical to which to appeal, nothing fixed by which always to estimate. Thus, in spite of a seeming recognition of truth, we shall be turned adrift on a wide sea of ignorance and self-sufficiency; and all because truth may be to us truth as it is in moral philosophy, truth as it is in well-arranged ethics, truth as it is in lucid and incontrovertible statements; and yet prove nothing but despised, and ill-understood, and powerless truth, as not being to us truth “as it is in Jesus.”

We add that the law of God, which has been given for the regulation of our conduct, is a wonderful compendium of truth. There is not a single

working of wickedness, though it be the lightest and most secret, which escapes the denuncements of this law; so that the statute-book proves itself truth by delineating, with an unvarying accuracy, the whole service of the father of lies. But who knows any thing of this truth, unless acquainted with the law as expounded and fulfilled by Christ? Christ in his discourses expanded every precept, and in his obedience exhibited every demand. He, therefore, who would know the truth which there is in the law, must know this truth, "as it is in Jesus." He, moreover, who would not be appalled by this truth, must view it "as it is in Jesus." Knowledge of the law would crush a man, if unaccompanied by the consciousness that Christ obeyed the law in his stead. So that truth "as it is in Jesus," this is knowledge, and this is comfort. And finally—for we must hurry over ground where there is much which might tempt us to linger—look at the context of the words under review, and you will find that truth, "as it is in Jesus," differs from that truth, as it is out of Jesus, in being a sanctifying thing. The Ephesians were "taught, as the truth is in Jesus," to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Hence—and this after all is the grand distinction—truth, "as it is in Jesus," is a thing of the heart; whereas, truth, as it is out of Jesus, is a thing of the head. Dear Brethren, ye cannot be too often

told that without holiness “no man shall see the Lord<sup>1</sup>.” If no vigorous process of sanctification be going on within, we are destitute of the organs by which to read truth in the holy child Jesus. Or, rather, we are ignorant of the characters in which truth is graven on the Saviour: and therefore, though we may read it in books and manuscripts, on the glorious scroll of the heavens, and in the beautiful tracery of forest and mountain, we can never peruse it as written in the person and work of God’s only and well-beloved Son. The mortification of the flesh—the keeping under the body—the plucking out the offending right eye—the cutting off the offending right hand—these, so to speak, are the processes of tuition by which men are taught “as the truth is in Jesus.” Sanctification conducts to knowledge, and then knowledge speeds the work of sanctification.

We beseech you, therefore, that ye strive, through God’s grace, to give yourselves to the business of putting off the old man. Will ye affirm that ye believe there is a heaven, and yet act as though persuaded that it is not worth striving for? Believe, only believe, that a day of coronation is yet to break on this long-darkened globe, and the sinews will be strung, like those of the wrestlers of old, who saw the garlands in the judge’s hands, and locked them-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 14.

selves in an iron embrace. Strive—for the grasp of a destroyer is upon you, and if ye be not wrenched away, it will palsy you, and crush you. Strive—for the foe is on the right hand, on the left hand, before you, behind you ; and ye must be trampled under foot, if ye struggle not, and strike not, as those who feel themselves bound in a death-grapple. Strive—there is a crown to be won—the mines of the earth have not furnished its metal, and the depths of the sea hide nothing so radiant as the jewels with which it is wreathed. Strive—for if ye gain not this crown—alas ! alas ! ye must have the scorpions for ever round the forehead, and the circles of that flame which is fanned by the breath of the Almighty's displeasure.

Strive then, but strive in the strength of your risen Lord, and not in your own. Ye know not how soon that Lord may come. Whilst the sun walks his usual path on the firmament, and the grass is springing in our fields, and merchants are crowding the exchange, and politicians jostling for place, and the voluptuous killing time, and the avaricious counting gold, “the sign of the Son of Man<sup>1</sup>” shall be seen in the heavens, and the august throne of fire and of cloud be piled for judgment. Be ye then persuaded. If not persuaded, be ye alarmed. There is truth in Jesus which is terrible, as well as truth which is soothing : terrible, for he shall be Judge as

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiv. 30.



well as Saviour; and ye cannot face Him, ye cannot stand before Him, unless ye now give ear to his invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 28.

## SERMON XII.

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### THE DIFFICULTIES OF SCRIPTURE.

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2 PETER iii. 16.

“In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

THE writings of St. Paul, occupying, as they do, a large portion of the New Testament, treat much of the sublimer and more difficult articles of Christianity. It is undeniable that there is a great deal made known to us by the Epistles, which could only imperfectly, if at all, be derived from the Gospels. We have the testimony of Christ himself that he had many things to say to his disciples, which, whilst he yet ministered on earth, they were not prepared to receive. Hence it was altogether to be expected that the New Testament would be, what we find it, a progressive book; the communications of intelligence growing with the fuller opening out of the dispensation. The deep things of the sovereignty of God; the mode of the justification of sinners, and its perfect consistence with all the attributes of the

Creator; the mysteries bound up in the rejection of the Jew and the calling of the Gentile; these enter largely into the Epistles of St. Paul, though only faintly intimated by writers who precede him in the canon of Scripture. And it is a natural and unavoidable consequence on the greater abstruseness of the topics which are handled, that the Apostle's writings should present greater difficulties to the Biblical student. With the exception of the Book of Revelation, which, as dealing with the future, is necessarily hard to be interpreted, the Epistle to the Romans is probably that part of the New Testament which most demands the labours of the commentator. And though we select this Epistle as pre-eminent in difficulties, we may say generally of the writings of St. Paul, that, whilst they present simple and beautiful truths which all may understand, they contain statements of doctrine, which, even after long study and prayer, will be but partially unfolded by the most gifted inquirers. With this admission of difficulty we must join the likelihood of misconception and misapplication. Where there is confessedly obscurity, we may naturally expect that wrong theories will be formed, and erroneous inferences deduced. If it be hard to determine the true meaning of a passage, it can scarcely fail that some false interpretation will be advanced, or espoused, by the partisans of theological systems. If a man have error to maintain, he will turn for support to passages of Scripture, of which, the real

sense being doubtful, a plausible may be advanced on the side of his falsehood. If, again, an individual wish to persuade himself to believe tenets which encourage him in presumption and unholiness, he may easily fasten on separate verses, which, taken by themselves, and without concern for the analogy of faith, seem to mark out privileges as superseding the necessity of striving against sin. So that we can find no cause of surprise in the fact, that St. Peter should speak of the Epistles of St. Paul as wrested by the "unlearned and unstable" to their own destruction. He admits that in these Epistles "are some things hard to be understood." And we consider it, as we have just explained, a necessary consequence on the difficulties, that there should be perversions, whether wilful or unintentional, of the writings.

But you will observe, that, whilst St. Peter confesses both the difficulty and the attendant danger, he gives not the slightest intimation that the Epistles of St. Paul were unsuited to general perusal. The Roman Catholic, when supporting the tenet of his Church which shuts up the Bible from the laity, will appeal confidently to this statement of St. Peter, arguing that the allowed difficulty, and the declared danger, give the Apostle's authority to the measure of exclusion. But certainly it were not easy to find a more strained and far-fetched defence. Had St. Peter intended to infer, that, because obscurity and abuse existed, there ought to be prohibition, it

is altogether unaccountable that he did not lay down the inference. A fairer opportunity could never be presented for the announcement of such a rule as the Roman Catholic advocates. And the mere finding, that, when an inspired writer speaks of the dangers of perusal, he gives not even a hint which can be tortured into sanction of its prohibition, is, in itself, so overpowering a witness to the right of all men to read the Bible for themselves, that we wonder at the infatuation of those who can appeal to the passage as supporting a counter-opinion. You will observe that whilst St. Peter speaks only of the writings of St. Paul as presenting "things hard to be understood," he extends to the whole Bible the warning of the unlearned and unstable. So that, when there is wanting that chastened, and teachable, and prayerful disposition, which should always be brought to the study of Scripture, the plainest passages and the most obscure may be equally abused. After all, it is not so much the difficulty which makes the danger, as the temper in which the Bible is perused. And if St. Peter's statement prove any thing, it proves that selections from Holy Writ, such as the Papist will allow, are to the full as fraught with peril as the unmutated volume; and that, therefore, unless a man is to read all, he ought not to read a line. We cannot but admire the manner in which the Apostle has expressed himself. If he had specified difficulties; if he had stated that it was upon such or such points

that St. Paul's Epistles, or the Scriptures in general were obscure; those who are disposed to give part, and to keep back part, might have had a ground for their decision, and a rule for their selection. But since we have nothing but a round assertion that all the Scriptures may be, and are, wrested by the unlearned and unstable, there is left us no right of determining what is fit for perusal and what is not fit; so that, in allowing a solitary verse to be read, we run the same risk as in allowing every chapter from the first to the last. Thus we hold it clear to every candid enquirer, that our text simply proves the necessity of a right temper to the profitable perusal of the Bible. It gives no such exclusive characteristic to the writings of St. Paul, as would warrant our pronouncing them peculiarly unsuited to the weak and illiterate. If it sanction the withdrawment of any part of the Bible, it imperatively demands the withdrawment of the whole. And forasmuch as it thus gives not the shadow of authority to the selection of one part and the omission of another; and, forasmuch, moreover, as it contains not the remotest hint that danger is a reason for shutting up the Scriptures; we rather learn from the passage, that free as the air should be the Bible to the whole human population, than that a priesthood, sitting in assize on its contents, may dole out fragments of the word, or keep it, if they please, undividedly to themselves.

We are not, however, required, in addressing a

Protestant assembly, to expose, at any length, the falsehood of that doctrine of popery to which we have referred. We introduced its mention, simply because its advocates endeavour to uphold it by our text. They just give a new witness to the truth of the text. They show, that, like the rest of the Scriptures, this verse may be perverted. The very passage which declares that all Scripture may be wrested, has itself been wrested to the worst and most pernicious of purposes. So that, as if in verification of the statement of St. Peter, when that statement became part of the Bible, it was seized upon by the "unlearned and unstable," and wrenched from its original bearings.

But we desire, on the present occasion, to bring before you what we count important considerations, suggested by the announcement that there are difficulties in Scripture. We have the decision of an inspired writer, that, in the volume of inspiration there "are some things hard to be understood." We lay great stress on the fact, that it is an inspired writer who gives this decision. The Bible attests the difficulties of the Bible. If we knew the Bible to be difficult, only as finding it difficult, we might be inclined to suppose it luminous to others, though obscure to ourselves. We should not so thoroughly understand that the difficulties, which one man meets with in the study of Scripture, are not simply produced by his intellectual inferiority to another—no, nor by his moral or spi-

ritual inferiority—but are, in a great degree, inherent in the subject examined, so that no equipment of learning and prayer will altogether secure their removal. The assertion of our text may be called an unqualified assertion. The proof, that there are “things hard to be understood,” does not lie in the fact, that these things are wrested by “the unlearned and unstable:” for then, by parity of reason, we should make St. Peter declare that all Scripture is “hard to be understood.” The assertion is independent on what follows, and shows the existence of difficulties, whether or no they gave occasion to perversions of the Bible. And though it is of the writings of St. Paul, and of these alone, that the assertion is made, we may infer naturally, from the remainder of the passage, that the apostle intended to imply that difficulties are scattered through the whole of the Scriptures, so that it is a general characteristic of the Bible, that there are in it “some things hard to be understood.”

Now it is upon this characteristic—a characteristic, you observe, not imagined by ourselves, because often unable to bring out all the force of a passage, but fastened on the Scriptures by the Scriptures themselves—that we desire to turn your attention. We have before us a feature of revelation, drawn by revelation itself, and not sketched by human surmise or discovery. And it seems to us that this feature deserves our very closest examination, and that from such examination we may look to derive lessons of



more than ordinary worth. We take into our hands the Bible, and receive it as a communication of God's will, made in past ages to his creatures. And we know that, occupying, as all men do, the same level of helplessness and destitution, so that the adventitious circumstances of rank and education bring with them no differences in moral position, it cannot be the design of the Almighty, that superior talent, or superior learning, should be essential to the obtaining due acquaintance with revelation. There can be no fairer expectation than that the Bible will be intelligible to every capacity, and that it will not, either in matter or manner, adapt itself to one class in preference to another. And when, with all this antecedent idea that revelation will condescend to the very meanest understanding, we find, as it were, on the covers of the book, the description that there are in it "things hard to be understood," we may, at first, feel something of surprise that difficulty should occur where we had looked for simplicity. And undoubtedly, however fair the expectation just mentioned, the Bible is, in some senses, a harder book for the uneducated man than for the educated. So far as human instrumentality is concerned, the great mass of a population must be indebted to a few learned men for any acquaintance whatsoever with the Scriptures. Never let learning be made of small account in reference to religion, when, without learning, a kingdom must remain virtually without a revelation. If there were no learning in a land, or

if that learning were not brought to bear on translations of Scripture, how could one out of a thousand know any thing of the Bible? Those who would dispense with literature in a priesthood, undermine a nation's great rampart against heathenism. And just as the unlearned are thus, at the very outset, dependent altogether on the learned, it is not to be denied that the learned man will possess always a superiority over the unlearned, and that he has an apparatus at his disposal, which the other has not, for overcoming much that is difficult in Scripture.

But after all, when St. Peter speaks of "things hard to be understood," he cannot be considered as referring to obscurities which human learning will dissipate. He certainly mentions the "unlearned" as wresting these difficulties, implying that the want of learning produced the perversion. But, of course, he intends by "unlearned" those who were not fully taught of the Spirit, and not those who were deficient in the acquirements of the academy. There were but few of the learned of the earth amongst the apostles and their followers; and it were absurd to imagine that all but those wrested the Scriptures to their destruction. And, therefore, whilst we frankly allow that there are difficulties in Holy Writ, for the coping with which human learning equips an individual—historical difficulties, for example, grammatical, chronological—we see, at once, that it cannot be to these St. Peter refers; since, when he wrote, either these difficulties had not come into existence,

or he himself was classed with the "unlearned," if by "unlearned" were intended the men unenlightened by science.

We thus assure ourselves, that, in allowing "things hard to be understood" to find place in the volume of inspiration, God has dealt with mankind irrespectively of the differences of rank. It cannot be human learning which makes these things comparatively easy to be understood. They must remain hard, aye, and equally hard, whatever the literary advantages of a student; otherwise the whole statement of our text becomes unintelligible. The "unlearned," in short, are also "the unstable:" it is not the want of earthly scholarship which makes the difficulties, it is the want of moral steadfastness which occasions the wresting. We have nothing, therefore, to do, in commenting on the words of St. Peter, with difficulties which may be caused by a defective, and removed by a liberal education. The difficulties must be difficulties of subject. The things which are handled, and which are "hard to be understood," must, in themselves, be deep and mysterious, and not such as present intricacies which human criticism may prevail to unravel. And that there are many of these things in the Bible will be questioned by none who have given themselves to its study. It were a waste of time to adduce instances of the difficulties. To be unacquainted with them is to be unacquainted with Scripture: whilst to be surprised at their existence is to be surprised at what we may call

unavoidable. It is this latter point which chiefly requires illustration, though there are others which must not be passed over in silence. We assume, therefore, as matter-of-fact, that there are in Scripture "things hard to be understood." We shall endeavour to show you, in the first place, that this fact was to be expected. We shall then, in the second place, point out the advantages which follow from the fact, and the dispositions which it should encourage.

And, first, we would show you—though this point requires but brief examination—that it was to be expected, that the Bible would contain "some things hard to be understood." We should like to be told what stamp of inspiration there would be upon a Bible containing nothing "hard to be understood." Is it not almost a self-evident proposition, that a revelation without difficulty could not be a revelation of divinity? If there lie any thing of that unmeasured separation, which we are all conscious there must lie, between ourselves and the Creator, is it not clear that God cannot be comprehensible by man; and that, therefore, any professed revelation, which left him not incomprehensible, would be thereby its own witness to the falsehood of its pretensions? You ask a Bible which shall, in every part, be simple and intelligible. But could such a Bible discourse to us of God, that Being who must remain, necessarily and for ever, a mystery to the very highest of created intelligences? Could such a Bible

treat of purposes, which extending themselves over unlimited ages, and embracing the universe within their range, demand eternity for their development, and infinity for their theatre? Could such a Bible put forward any account of spiritual operations, seeing that, whilst confined by the trammels of matter, the soul cannot fathom herself, but withdraws herself, as it were, and shrinks from her own scrutiny? Could such a Bible, in short, tell us any thing of our condition, whether by nature or grace? Could it treat of the entrance of evil; could it treat of the Incarnation; of Regeneration; of a Resurrection; of an Immortality? In reference to all these matters, there are in the Bible "things hard to be understood." But it is not the manner in which they are handled which makes them "hard to be understood." The subject itself gives the difficulty. If you will not have the difficulty, you cannot have the subject. You must have a Revelation which shall say nothing on the nature of God, for that must remain inexplicable; nothing on the soul, for that must remain inexplicable; nothing on the processes and workings of grace, for these must remain inexplicable. You must have a Revelation, which shall not only tell you that such and such things are, but which shall also explain to you how they are; their mode, their constitution, their essence. And if this were the character of Revelation, it would undoubtedly be so constructed as never to overtask reason; but it would, just as clearly, be kept within this boundary

only by being stripped of all on which we mainly need a Revelation. A Revelation in which there shall be nothing "hard to be understood," must limit itself by the powers of reason, and, therefore, exclude those very topics on which, reason being insufficient, revelation is required. We wish you to be satisfied on the point, that scriptural difficulties are not the result of obscurity of style, of brevity of communication, or of a designed abstruseness in the method of argument. The difficulties lie simply in the mysteriousness of the subjects. There is no want of simplicity of language when God is described to us as always every where. But who understands this? Can language make this intelligible? Revelation assures us of the fact; reason, with all her stridings, cannot overtake that fact. But would you, therefore, require that the omnipresence of Deity should be shut out from revelation? There is a perfect precision and plainness of speech, when the Bible discourses on the Word being made flesh, and on the second person in the Trinity humbling himself to the being "found in fashion as a man<sup>1</sup>." But who can grapple with this prodigy? Is the palpable impossibility of explaining, or understanding it, at all the result of deficiency of statement? Who does not feel that the impossibility lies in himself, and that the matter is unintelligible, because necessarily overpassing the sweep of his intelligence? He can receive the bare fact; he cannot receive the explana-

<sup>1</sup> Philip. ii. 8.

tion. But shall we on this account, and just in order to have a Bible free from "things hard to be understood," require the Incarnation to be expunged from revelation?

We might argue in like manner with regard to every scriptural difficulty. We account for the existence of these difficulties mainly by the fact that we are men, and, because men, finite in our capacities. We suppose not that it would have been possible, by any power of description or process of explanation, to have made those things which are now hard, easier to be understood, unless the human faculties had been amplified and strengthened, so that men had been carried up to a higher rank of being. We can quite believe that to an angel, endowed with a nobler equipment of intellectual energy and unincumbered with a framework of matter, there would be a far clearer idea conveyed by the revelation, that "there are three that bear record in heaven, and these three are one<sup>1</sup>," than is conveyed by such announcement to ourselves. But it does not, therefore, follow that the doctrine of the Trinity might have been made as comprehensible by us as by angels. Let there be only the same amount of revelation, and the angel may know more than the man, because gifted with a keener and more vigorous understanding. And it is evident, therefore, that few things could have less warrant than

<sup>1</sup> 1 John v. 7.

the supposition, that revelation might have been so enlarged, that the knowledge of man would have reached to the measure of the knowledge of angels. We again say that there is no deficiency of revelation, and that the difficulties which occur in the perusal of Scripture result from the majesty of the introduced subjects, and the weakness of the faculties turned on their study. . It is little short of a contradiction in terms, to speak of a revelation free altogether from "things hard to be understood." And we are well persuaded, that, however disposed men may be to make the difficulties an objection to the Bible, the absence of those difficulties would have been eagerly seized on as a proof of imposture. There would have been fairness in the objection—and scepticism would not have been slow in triumphantly urging it—that a book, which brought down the infinite to the level of the finite, must contain false representations, and deserve, therefore, to be placed under the outlawry of the world. We should have had reason taking up an opposite position, but one far more tenable than she occupies when arguing from the difficulty, against the divinity, of Scripture. Reason has sagacity enough, if you remove the bias of the "evil heart of unbelief<sup>1</sup>," to perceive the impossibility that God should be searched out and comprehended by man. And if, therefore, reason sat in judgment on a professed revelation of the Almighty, and found

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iii. 12.



that it gave no account of the Deity, but one, in every respect, easy and intelligible, so that God described himself as removed not, either in essence or properties, from the ken of humanity; it can scarcely be questioned that she would give down as her verdict, and that justice would loudly applaud the decision, that the alleged communication from heaven wanted the signs the most elementary of so illustrious an origin.

It can only be viewed as a necessary consequence on the grandeur of the subjects which form the matter of revelation, that, with every endeavour at simplicity of style and aptitude of illustration, the document contains statements which overmatch all but the faith of mankind. And, therefore, we are bold to say that we glory in the difficulties of Scripture. We can indeed desire, as well as those who would turn these difficulties into occasion of cavil and objection, to understand, with a thorough accuracy, the registered truths, and to penetrate and explore those solemn mysteries which crowd the pages of inspiration. We can feel, whilst the volume of Holy Writ lies open before us, and facts are presented which seem every way infinite—height, and breadth, and depth, and length, all defying the boldest journeyings of the spirit—we can feel the quick pulse of an eager wish to scale the mountain, or fathom the abyss. But, at the same time, we know, and we feel, that a Bible without difficulties were a firmament without stars. We know, and we

feel, that a far-off land, enamelled, as we believe it, with a loveliness which is not of this earth, and inhabited by a tenantry gloriously distinct from our own order of being, would not be the magnificent and richly-peopled domain which it is, if its descriptions overpassed not the outlines of human geography. We know, and we feel, that the Creator of all things, he who stretched out the heavens, and sprinkled them with worlds, could not be, what we are assured that He is, inaccessibly sublime and awfully great, if there could be given us a portrait of his nature and properties, whose every feature might be sketched by a human pencil, whose every characteristic scanned by a human vision. We know, and we feel, that the vast business of our redemption, arranged in the councils of the far-back eternity, and acted out amid the wonderings and throbbings of the universe, could not have been that stupendous transaction which gave God glory by giving sinners safety, if the inspired account brought its dimensions within the compass of a human arithmetic, or defined its issues by the lines of a human demarcation. And, therefore, do we also know and feel that it is a witness to the inspiration of the Bible, that, when this Bible would furnish us with notices of the unseen world hereafter to be traversed, or when it would turn thought on the Omnipotent, or when it would open up the scheme of the restoration of the fallen ; then, with much that is beautifully simple, and which the way-faring man can read and understand, there are mingled

dark intimations, and pregnant hints, and undeveloped statements, before which the weak and the masterful must alike do the homage of a reverent and uncalculating submission. We could not rise up from the perusal of Scripture with a deep conviction that it is the word of the living God, if we had found no occasions on which reason was required to humble herself before giantlike truth, and implicit faith has been the only act which came within our range of moral achievement. We do not indeed say—for the saying would carry absurdity on its forefront—that we believe a document inspired, because, in part, incomprehensible. But if a document profess to be inspired; and if it treat of subjects which we can prove beforehand to be above and beyond the stretchings of our intellect; then, we do say that the finding nothing in such a document to baffle the understanding would be a proof the most conclusive, that what alleges itself divine deserves rejection as a forgery. And whilst, therefore, we see going forward on all sides the accumulation of the evidences of Christianity, and history and science are bringing their stores and emptying them at the feet of our religion, and the very wrath of the adversary, being the accomplishment of prophecy, is proving that we follow no “cunningly devised fables<sup>1</sup>”; we feel that it was so much to be expected, yea, rather that it was altogether so unavoidable, that a revelation would, in

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. i. 16.

many parts, be obscure, that we take as the last link in the chain of a lengthened and irrefragable demonstration, that there are in the Bible "things hard to be understood."

But we trench on the second division of our subject, and will proceed, therefore, to the more distinct exposition of the advantages which follow, and the dispositions which should be encouraged by the fact which has passed under review. We see, at once, from the statement of St. Peter, that effects, to all appearance disastrous, are produced by the difficulties of Scripture. The "unlearned and unstable" wrest these difficulties to "their own destruction;" and, therefore, though we have proved these difficulties unavoidable, by what process of reasoning can they be proved advantageous? Now, if we have carried you along with us through our foregoing argument, you are already furnished with one answer to this inquiry. We have shown you that the absence of difficulties would go far towards proving the Scriptures uninspired: and we need not remark that there must be a use for difficulties, if essential to the complete witness for the truth of Christianity. But there are other advantages which must, on no account, be overlooked. We only wish it premised, that, though the difficulties of Scripture—as, for example, those parts which involve predestination—are wrested by many "to their own destruction," the "unlearned and unstable" would have equally perished, had no difficulties whatsoever

existed. As the case indeed now stands, the "things hard to be understood" are the stumbling-blocks over which they fall, and, falling, are destroyed. But they would have stumbled on the plain ground as well as on the rough: there being no more certain truth in theology, than that the cause of stumbling is the internal feebleness, and not the external impediment. A man may perish, ostensibly through abuse of the doctrine of election. He may say, I am elect, and, therefore, shall be saved, though I continue in sin. Thus he wrests election, and that too to his own certain destruction. But would he not have perished, had he found no such doctrine to wrest? Aye, that he would; as fatally, and as finally. It is the love of sin, the determination to live in sin, which destroys him. And though, whilst giving the reins to his lusts, he attempt to derive from election a quietus and excuse, can you think that he would be at a loss to find them elsewhere, if there were no doctrine of election from which, when abused, they may be wrenched and extorted? It is possible that a man may slay himself with "the sword of the Spirit<sup>1</sup>;" but only because he is so bent upon suicide, that had he not found so costly a weapon, he would have fallen on a ruder and less polished. Satan has every kind of instrument in his armoury, and leaves no one at a loss for a method of self-destruction. So that, had it not been unavoid-

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. vi. 17.

able that "things hard to be understood" should find place in the Bible, their insertion, though apparently causing the ruin of many, would in no degree have impeached the loving-kindness of the Almighty. Scriptural difficulties destroy none who would not have been destroyed, had no difficulties existed. And, therefore, difficulties might be permitted for certain ends which they, undoubtedly, subserve, and yet not a solitary individual be injured by an allowance which is to benefit the great body of the Church. We wish this conclusion borne carefully in mind, because the first impression, on reading our text, is, that some are destroyed by the "things hard to be understood," and that they would not have been destroyed without these things to wrest. This first impression is a wrong one; the hard things giving the occasion, but never being the cause of destruction. The unstable wrest what is difficult. But, rather than be without something to pervert, if there were not the difficult, they would wrest the simple.

This being premised, we may enlarge, without fear, on the advantages resulting from the fact, that Scripture contains "some things hard to be understood." And first, if there were nothing in Scripture which overpowered our reason, who sees not that intellectual pride would be fostered by its study? The grand moral discipline which the Bible now exerts, and which renders its perusal the best exercise to which men can be subjected, lies simply in its perpetual requisition that Reason submit herself

to Revelation. You can make no way with the disclosures of Holy Writ, until prepared to receive, on the authority of God, a vast deal which, of yourself, you cannot prove, and still more which you cannot explain. And it is a fine schooling for the student, when, at every step in his research, he finds himself thrown on his faith, required to admit truth because the Almighty hath spoken it, and not because he himself can demonstrate. It is just the most rigorous and wholesome tuition under which the human mind can be brought, when it is continually called off from its favourite processes of argument and commentary, and summoned into the position of a meek recipient of intelligence to be taken without questioning—honoured with belief when it cannot be cleared by exposition. And of all this schooling and tuition you would instantly deprive us, if you took away from the Bible “things hard to be understood.” Nay, it were comparatively little that we should lose the discipline: we should live under a counter system, encouraging what we are bound to repress. If man were at all left to entertain the idea that he can comprehend God, or measure his purposes—and such idea might be lawful, were there no mysteries in Scripture—we know no bounds which could be set to his intellectual haughtiness: for if reason seemed able to embrace Deity, who could persuade her that she is scant and contracted? I might almost be pardoned the fostering a consciousness of mental greatness, and the supposing myself

endowed with a vast nobility of spirit, if I found that I kept pace with all the wonders which God brought out from his own nature and his own dwelling, and if no disclosures were made to this creation too dazzling for my scrutiny, or too deep for my penetration. A Bible without difficulties would be a censer full of incense to man's reason. It would be the greatest flatterer of reason, passing on it a compliment and eulogy which would infinitely outdo the most far-fetched of human panegyrics. And if the fallen require to be kept humble; if we can advance in spiritual attainment only in proportion as we feel our insignificance; would not this conversion of the Bible into the very nurse and encourager of intellectual pride, abstract its best worth from revelation? and who, therefore, will deny that we are advantaged by the fact, that there are in Scripture "things hard to be understood?"

We remark again, that though controversy have its evils, it has also its uses. We never infer, that, because there is no controversy in a church, there must be the upholding of sound doctrine. It is not the stagnant water which is generally the purest. And if there are no differences of opinion which set men on examining and ascertaining their own belief, the probability is, that, like the Samaritans of old, they will worship they "know not what<sup>1</sup>." Heresy itself is, in one sense, singularly beneficial. It helps

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 22.



to sift a professing community, and to separate the chaff from the wheat. And whilst the unstable are carried about by the winds of false doctrine, those who keep their steadfastness find, as it were, their moral atmosphere cleared by the tempest. We consider this statement to be that of St. Paul, when he says to the Corinthians, "there must be also heresies amongst you, that they which are approved may be made manifest<sup>1</sup>." And it is not the mere separation of the genuine from the fictitious which is effected through the publication of error. We hold that heresies have been of vast service to the Church, in that they have caused truth to be more thoroughly scanned, and all its bearings and boundaries explored with a most pains-taking industry. It is astonishing how apt men are to rest in general and ill-defined notions, so that, when interrogated and probed on an article of faith, they show themselves unable to give account of their belief. When a new error is propounded, you will find that candid men will confess, that, on examining their own views on the litigated point, they have found them in many respects vague and incoherent; so that, until driven to the work of expounding and defining, they have never suspected their ignorance upon matters with which they professed themselves altogether familiar. We think that few men would have correct notions of truth, unless occasionally compelled to investigate their

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 19.

own opinions. They take for granted that they understand what they believe. But when heresy or controversy arises, and they are required to state what they hold, they will themselves be surprised at the confusion of their sentiments. We are persuaded, for example, that, however mischievous in many respects may have been the modern agitation of the question of Christ's humanity, the great body of Christians have been thereby advantaged. Until the debate was raised, hundreds and thousands were unconsciously holding error. Being never required to define the true doctrine of the Saviour's person, they never doubted that they knew and understood it, though, all the while, they either confounded the natures, or multiplied the person; or—and this was the ordinary case—formed no idea at all on so mysterious, yet fundamental a matter. Thus controversy stirs the waters, and prevents their growing stagnant. We do not indeed understand from the "must be" of St. Paul, that the well-being of the Church is dependent on heresy, so that, unless heresy enter, the Church cannot prosper. But we can readily suppose that God, foreknowing the corruptions which would be attempted of the Gospel, determined to employ these corruptions as instruments for speeding onward the growth in grace of his people. The "must be" refers to human depravity and Satanic influence. It indicates a necessity for which the creature alone is answerable, whilst the end, which heresies subserve, is that which most engages the interferences of the

Creator. Thus we speak of evil as beneficial, only as over-ruled by the Almighty, and pronounce controversy advantageous, because a corrupt nature needs frequent agitation. If never called to defend the truth, the Church would comparatively lose sight of what truth is. And therefore, however the absence of controversy may agree well with a millennial estate, we are amongst the last who would desire that it should not now be heard in the land. We feel that if now "the wolf should dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid<sup>1</sup>," we should have nothing but the millennium of liberalism; the lamb being little more than the wolf in disguise, and the kid the leopard with his spots slightly coloured. Such is the constitution of man—and such it will be, till there pass over this globe a mighty regeneration—that, unless there be opposition, we shall have no purity. Dissent itself, with its manifold and multiform evils, has done the Church service; and, by rousing energies which might otherwise have lain dormant, has given fixedness where it thought to undermine. But if there were no scriptural difficulties, we could have no controversy. The "things hard to be understood" form the groundwork of differences of opinion: and, if these were swept away, there would either be space for only one theory, or, if another were broached, it would be too absurd for debate. So that scriptural difficulties are

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xi. 6.

literally the preservatives of sound doctrine. The Church would slumber into ignorance of even simple and elementary truth, if there were no hard things, which, wrested by the unstable, keep her always on the alert. And if, therefore, the upholding, through successive generations, of a clear and orthodox creed, be a result which you hail as teeming with advantage, have we not a right to press home on you the fact, that it is advantageous to mankind that there are in the Bible "some things hard to be understood?"

We might extend on all sides our view of the advantages of difficulties. But we are confined by the limits of a discourse, and shall only adduce one other illustration. When I read the Bible, and meet with passages which, after the most patient exercises of thought and research, remain dark and impenetrable, then, in the most especial degree, I feel myself immortal. The finding a thing "hard to be understood" ministers to my consciousness that I am no perishable creature, destined to a finite existence, but a child of eternity, appointed to survive the dissolution of matter, and to enter on another and an untried being. If the Bible be God's revelation of himself to mankind, it is a most fair expectation, that, at one time or another, the whole of this revelation will be clear and accessible; that the obscure points, which we cannot now elucidate, and the lofty points, which we cannot now scale, will be enlightened by the flashings of a brighter luminary, and given up to the

marchings of a more vigorous inquiry. We can never think that God would tell man things, for the understanding of which he is to be always incapacitated. If he know them not now, the very fact of their being told is sufficient proof that he shall know them hereafter. And, therefore, in every scriptural difficulty I read the pledge of a mighty enlargement of the human faculties. In every mystery, though a darkness thick as the Egyptian may now seem to shroud it, I can find one bright and burning spot, glowing with promise that there shall yet come a day, when, every power of the soul being wrought into a celestial strength, I shall be privileged, as it were, to stretch out the hand of the lawgiver, and roll back the clouds which here envelope the truth. I can muse upon one of those things which are "hard to be understood," till it seem to put on the prophet's mantle, and preach to me of futurity; telling me, in accents more spirit-stirring than those of the boldest of mortal oratory, that the present is but the infancy of my being; and that, in a nobler and more glorious estate, I shall start from moral and mental dwarfishness, and, endowed with vigour of perception, and keenness of vision, and vastness of apprehension, walk the labyrinth, and pierce the rock, and weigh the mountain. Oh, I can thank God that, amongst those countless mercies which he has poured down on our pathway, he hath given us a Bible which is not in every part to be explained. The difficulties of Holy Writ—let them be made by objectors the sub-

jects of marvel, or of cavil—they constitute one great sheet of our charter of immortality: and, in place of wondering that God should have permitted them, or lamenting that they cannot be overcome, I rejoice in them as earnest, given me by Him “who cannot lie<sup>1</sup>,” that man hath yet to advance to a sublime rank amongst orders of intelligence, and to stand, in the maturity of his strength, in the very centre of the panorama of truth. And if it be true that every mystery in Scripture, as giving pledge of an enlargement of capacities, witnesses to the glories with which the future comes charged; and if from every intricate passage, and every dark saying, and every unfathomable statement, we draw new proof of the magnificence of our destinies; which of you will withhold his confession, that the difficulties of the Bible are productive of benefit, and that, consequently, there result advantages from the fact, that there are in Scripture “some things hard to be understood?”

Such are certain of the advantages which we proposed to investigate. It yet remains that we briefly state, and call upon you to cultivate, the dispositions which should be brought to the study of a Bible thus “hard to be understood.” We have shown you that there are difficulties in Scripture which must remain unexplained, whilst we continue in the flesh. Other difficulties indeed may be removed by thought and

<sup>1</sup> Titus i. 2.

prayer and research; and we would not have you sparing of any of these appliances when you examine the volume of inspiration. But difficulties which are inherent in the subject; things “hard to be understood” because they deal, for example, with the nature and purposes and workings of Deity; these are not to be mastered by any powers of reason, and are, therefore, matters for the exercise of faith rather than of intellect. We ought to know, before we open the Bible, that it must present difficulties of this class and description. We are therefore bound, if, in idolizing reason, we will not degrade and decry it, to sit down to the study of Scripture with a meek and chastened understanding, expecting to be baffled, and ready to submit. We tell the young amongst you more especially, who, in the pride of an undisciplined intellect, would turn to St. Paul as they turn to Bacon or Locke, arguing that what was written for man must be comprehensible by man—we tell them that nothing is excellent out of its place; and that, in the examination of Scripture, then only does reason show herself noble, when, conscious of the presence of a king, the knee is bent, and the head uncovered. We would have it, therefore, remembered, that the docility and submissiveness of a child alone befit the student of the Bible; and that, if we would not have the whole volume darkened, its simplest truths eluding the grasp of our understanding, or gaining, at least, no hold on our affections, we must lay aside the feelings which we

carry into the domains of science and philosophy, not arming ourselves with a chivalrous resolve to conquer, but with one which it is a thousand-fold harder either to form or execute, to yield.

The Holy Spirit alone can make us feel the things which are easy to be understood, and prevent our wresting those which are hard. Never then should the Bible be opened except with prayer for the teachings of this Spirit. You will read without profit, as long as you read without prayer. It is only in the degree that the Spirit, which indited a text, takes it from the page and breathes it into the heart, that we can comprehend its meaning, be touched by its beauty, stirred by its remonstrance, or animated by its promise. We shall never, then, master scriptural difficulties by the methods which prove successful in grappling with philosophical. Why is it that the poor peasant, whose understanding is weak and undisciplined, has clear insight into the meaning of verses, and finds in them irresistible power and inexhaustible comfort, whilst the very same passages are given up as mysteries, or overlooked as unimportant, by the high and lettered champion of a scholastic theology? It were idle to deny that our rustic divines will oftentimes travel, with a far stauncher and more dominant step than our collegiate, into the depths of a scriptural statement; and that you might obtain from some of the patriarchs of our valleys, whose chief instruction has been their own communing with the Almighty, such



explanations of "things hard to be understood" as would put to shame the commentaries of our most learned expositors. And of this phenomenon the solution would be hopeless, if there were not a broad instituted difference between human and sacred literature: "the kingdom of heaven" being "like unto treasure hid in a field <sup>1</sup>;" and the finding this treasure depending not at all on the power of the intellect brought to the search, but on the heartiness and the earnestness with which the Psalmist's prayer is used, "open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law <sup>2</sup>." If you open a scientific book, or study an abstruse and metaphysical work, let reason gird herself boldly for the task: the province belongs fairly to her jurisdiction; and she may cling to her own energies without laying herself open to the charge, that, according to the characteristic which Joel gives of the last times, the weak is vaunting itself the strong <sup>3</sup>. But if you open the Bible, and sit down to the investigation of scriptural truth, you are in a district which lies far beyond the just limits of the empire of reason: there is need of an apparatus wholly distinct from that which sufficed for your former inquiry: and if you think to comprehend revelation, except so far as the author shall act as interpreter, you are, most emphatically, the weak pronouncing yourselves the strong, and the Bible shall be to you a closed book, and you shall break

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 44.<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxix. 18.<sup>3</sup> Joel iii. 10.

not the seals which God himself hath placed on the volume. Oh, they are seals which melt away like a snow-wreath, before the breathings of the Spirit; but not all the fire of human genius shall ever prevail to dissolve or loosen them.

We feel that we have a difficult part to perform in ministering to the congregation which assembles within these walls. Gathered as it is from many parts, and, without question, including oftentimes numbers who make no profession whatsoever of religion, we think it bound on us to seek out great variety of subjects, so that, if possible, the case of none of the audience may be quite overlooked in a series of discourses. And we feel it peculiarly needful that we touch now and then, as we have done this night, on topics connected with infidelity, because we fear that infidelity is growing in the land, and specially amongst its well-educated youth. If there be one saying in the Bible, bearing reference to the things of the present dispensation, on which we look with greater awe than on another, it is this of Christ Jesus, "when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth<sup>1</sup>?" It would seem to mark out a fierce conflict of antagonist principles, issuing in the almost total ejection of Christianity; so that, when the day of the second advent is ushered in by its august heraldry, it shall dawn upon blasted and blackened scenery, and discover the mass of mankind

<sup>1</sup> Luke xviii. 8.

carrying on, amid demolished temples and desecrated Bibles, the orgies of a dark and desperate revelry. And knowing that such is the tenor of prophecy, and gathering from many and infallible signs that already has the war-tug begun, we warn you, and beseech you, with all the veins of our heart, that ye be on your guard against the inroads of scepticism. We speak peculiarly to the young, the young men who throng this chapel, and who, in the intercourses of life, will meet with many who lie in wait to deceive. It is not possible that you should mix much with the men of this liberal and libertine age, and not hear insinuations, either more or less direct, thrown out against the grand and saving tenets of Christianity. You cannot, even by the exercise of the most godly circumspection, keep yourselves wholly at a distance from the sarcasms or sophisms of insidious and pestilent teachers. The enemy is ever on the watch; and, adapting himself to the various dispositions and circumstances of those whom he seeks to entangle, can address the illiterate with a hollow jest, and assail the educated with a well-turned objection. Oh, I could tremble for those, who, blind to the weakness which is naturally the portion of our race, and rashly confident in a strength to which the fallen have no jot of pretension, adventure themselves now upon the sea of life, and go forth into a world where must often be encountered temptations to think lightly of the faith of their fathers. Oh, I say, I could tremble for them. If

any amongst you—I speak it with all affection, and from the knowledge which positions in life have enabled me to form of the progress of youthful infidelity—if any amongst you enter the busy scenes of society, with an overweening confidence in your own capacities, with a lofty opinion of the powers of reason, and with a hardy persuasion that there is nerve enough in the mind to grapple with divine mysteries, and vigour enough to discover truth for itself—if, in short, you, the weak, shall say we are strong—then I fear for you, far more than I can tell, that you may fall an easy prey to some champion of heretical error, and give ready ear to the flattering schemes of the worshippers of intellect; and that thus a mortal blight shall desecrate the buds of early promise, and eternity frown on you with all the cheerlessness which it wears to those who despise the blood of atonement, and you—the children, it may be, of pious parents, over whose infancy a godly father hath watched, and whose young years have been guarded by the tender solitudes of a righteous mother—you may win to yourselves a heritage of shame and confusion, and go down, at the judgment, into the pit of the unbelieving and scornful. Better, infinitely better would it have been, that your parents had seen you coffined and sepulchred, ere as yet ye knew evil from good, than that they should have nursed you, and nurtured you, to swell, in later days, the ranks of the apostate. Be admonished, by the subject

which we have this night discussed, to distrust yourselves, and to depend on a higher teaching than human. Difficulties there are in the Bible: but they ought rather to assure, than make you doubtful of, the divinity of its origin. And if you are assailed with sceptical objections which you are unable to answer, have the candour and modesty to suspect that a straightforward and sufficient answer there may be, though you have not the penetration to discover it. Lay not the blame on the deficiencies of Christianity, when it may possibly lie in the deficiencies of your own information. The argument was never framed against the truth of our religion, which has not been completely taken off and triumphantly refuted. Hesitate, therefore, before you conclude a sceptic in the right, just because you are not able to prove him in the wrong. We give you this advice, simply and affectionately. We see your danger, and we long for your souls. Bear with us yet a moment. We would not weary you: but speaking on the topic of "things hard to be understood," we feel compelled to dwell, at some length, on the scepticism of the age. I can never dare answer, when I stand up in this holy place, and speak to you on the truths of our religion, that I address not some who throw on these truths habitual contempt, who count Christianity the plaything of children, invented by imposture, and cradled in ignorance. And if I knew that even now there were such amongst you; if they were pointed out to

me, so that I might stand face to face with the despisers of our Lord—the thunder, the sackcloth of hair, the worm that dies not, the fire that is not quenched—should I array against them these terrible things, and turn upon them the battery of the denunciations of God's wrath? Alas, alas, I should have no moral hold on them with all this apparatus of woe and destruction. They might wrap themselves up in their scepticism. They might tell me they had read too much, and learned too much, to be scared by the trickeries of priestcraft: and thus, by denying the authority of Scripture, they would virtually blunt all my weapons of attack, and show themselves invulnerable, because they had made themselves insensible. There is nothing that the minister could do, save that which Elisha the prophet did, when speaking with Hazael: "he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept<sup>1</sup>." Who could do otherwise than weep over the spectacle of talents, and hopes, and affections, tainted with the leprous spots of moral decay, the spectacle of a blighted immortality, the spectacle—a glimpse of which must almost convulse with amazement the glorious ranks of the celestial world—that of a being whom Christ purchased with his blood, whom the Almighty hath invited, yea, besought, to have mercy upon himself, turning into jest the messages of the Gospel, deny-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings viii. 10.

ing the divinity of the Lord his Redeemer, or building up, with the shreds and fragments of human reason, a baseless structure, which, like the palace of ice, shall resolve itself suddenly into a tumultuous flood, bearing away the inhabitant, a struggling thing, but a lost? Yea, if I knew there were one amongst you who had surrendered himself to the lies of an ensnaring philosophy, then, although I should feel, that, perhaps even whilst I speak, he is pitying my credulity, or ridiculing my fanaticism, I would not suffer him to depart without calling on the congregation to baptize him, as it were, with their tears; and he should be singled out—oh, not for rebuke, not for contempt, not for anger—but as more deserving to be wept over and wailed over than the poorest child of human calamity, more worthy of the agonies of mortal sympathy than he who eats the bitterest bread of affliction, and in whose ear ring mournfully the sleepless echoes of a funeral bell. Yea, and he should not leave the sanctuary till we had told him, that, though there be in the Bible “things hard to be understood,” there is one thing beautifully plain, and touchingly simple: and that is, that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin<sup>1</sup>.” So that it is not yet too late: the blasphemer, the scorner, the infidel—oh, the fire is not yet falling, and the earth is not yet opening—let him turn unto the Lord and con-

<sup>1</sup> 1 John i. 7.

fess his iniquity, and cry for pardon, and a sweep of joy from the angels' harp-strings shall tell out the astounding fact, that he is no longer a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God.

But we hasten to a conclusion. We again press upon all of you the importance of reading the Bible with prayer. And whilst the consciousness that Scripture contains "things hard to be understood" should bring us to its study in a dependent and humble temper, the thought, that what we know not now we shall know hereafter, should make each difficulty, as we leave it unvanquished, minister to our assurance that a wider sphere of being, a nearer vision, and mightier faculties, await us when the second advent of the Lord winds up the dispensation. Thus should the mysteries of the Bible teach us, at one and the same time, our nothingness, and our greatness; producing humility, and animating hope. I bow before these mysteries. I knew that I should find, and I pretend not to remove, them. But whilst I thus prostrate myself, it is with deep gladness and exultation of spirit. God would not have hinted the mystery, had he not designed hereafter to explain. And, therefore, are my thoughts on a far-off home, and rich things are around me, and the voices of many harpers, and the shinings of bright constellations, and the clusters of the cherub and the seraph; and a whisper, which seems not of this earth, is circulating through the soul, "Now we see



through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known<sup>1</sup>." May God grant unto all of us to be both abased and quickened by those things in the Bible which are "hard to be understood."

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

THE END.





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